WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A CONGREGATION ON A PATH OF INTERFAITH LEARNING

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The Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

The Rev. Christina Swenson O'Hara

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This Practical Research Project completed by

CHRISTINA SWENSON O'HARA

has been presented to and accepted by
the Faculty of the Claremont School of Theology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree

Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A CONGREGATION ON A PATH OF INTERFAITH LEARNING

by

Christina Swenson O'Hara

I am the rector of a small, primarily white, Anglo-European congregation in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. As my eyes have been opened to the growing diversity in our city and the importance of interfaith work, I have sought to bring this awareness to my congregation. My project involves creating a curriculum for Adult Education in the form of a World Religion Forum beginning with a presentation on Why Christians Should Learn about World Religions and introducing Krister Stendahl's Three Rules of Religious Understanding. The next four presentations exemplified these Rules, inviting representatives from Jewish, Lakota, Hindu, and Islamic faith to share with the congregation what their faith means and what they would want Christians to know about their faith. The initial written survey submitted by twenty parishioners and guests indicated very limited knowledge of the four religions on which we would focus and a limited number who had significant interreligious relationships. It also indicated that they expected that exposure to these world religions would strengthen their faith and not weaken or threaten it. Feedback forms submitted to parishioners and guests after each presentation asked what information they had learned, what struck them as positive aspects of the religions presented, what they would take from this religion as a blessing, and what further questions they had. The response to the series was positive with larger attendance each successive Wednesday night. Attendance was strong for a congregation of about sixty, with twenty to thirty people attending each Wednesday night, about half from the parish and about half guests. Attendees were grateful for the opportunity to

learn about world religions from adherents of those religions and for the opportunity to get to know them and to ask questions. The project opened our eyes to the world about us, helping us get to know some of our neighbors of different religions, giving us some crucial information about these religions, and helping to break down some of the misconceptions that we had about these religions. This project is one stage in a developing plan for interreligious engagement of the local church with various faith communities in our city. This initial project will continue with visits to various local congregations, developing relationships with people from these congregations, and seeking to develop a long-term partnership in service that we could do together from different faith traditions in order to serve our local community.

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to Dr. Nicholas Grier, my faculty advisor who encouraged me to move beyond centering Christianity, to Dr. Lincoln Galloway, my faculty reader who told me to block out time to write, and to Dr. Karen Dalton who encouraged me and helped me through obstacles I hadn't anticipated; to my peer reviewer Emily Melcher for her encouragement and thoughtful questions and edits; to my colleague and friend the Rev. Dr. Lauren Stanley for her eagle-eye editing and ideas to better this paper; to my Doctor of Ministry posse who helped get me through, you know who you are; to my parish the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd and those who joined us for the World Religion Forum, for letting me learn with and through your learning about how to love our neighbor; to our presenters and teachers, the Rev. Isaiah Brokenleg, Dr. Chandradhar Dwivedi, Dr. Muhammad Zeeshan Qamar, and Professor Anne Rome, you helped us to see your faith through your eyes and discover holy envy; we are ever changed by the encounter and your trust in us. Special thanks to my husband Dr. David O'Hara, my cheerleader, sounding board, and constant support, to my parents Jack and Cathy Swenson who gave me life and are always there to listen and support, and to my adult children Anastasia, Michael, and Matthew O'Hara, my greatest productions so far in becoming such compassionate human beings.

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Introduction: Research Question and My Experience

In this introduction I will discuss the problem and reason for my project, my own experience with interfaith relations, and why I feel this project addresses the problem in my community of a lack of awareness of what different religions believe.

"Why are people in Third World countries so backward, still using a mule and plow instead of machinery and technology?" The older woman in Bible Study asked the question out of the blue, based on a sense that the rest of world had not advanced as far as we in the Western world have. "Is it because they are not as smart as we are?" When it comes to religious traditions different from our own it seems that even though people are too nice to say it, there is an impression that those different traditions are barbaric and backward and perhaps bent on destroying us and our way of life.

For a mostly white Episcopal congregation of 60 or so members in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, there has not been much opportunity to understand faith traditions outside of Christianity. Particularly in our current polarized political climate, it is far too easy to stay in our own cultural bubble and not to reach out beyond that, to learn what it might look like to love the people of the variety of faiths, languages, and cultures that surround us. As Christians, Jesus commanded us to love God and to love our neighbor, but if we do not know and understand the people around us, how can we love them?

Sioux Falls was settled by people of mostly northern European ancestry and the city over its first century remained predominantly white. Recently however, Sioux Falls has grown in its ethnic and religious diversity. In the past seven years there have been two new mosques, a Muslim Community Center, a Vietnamese Buddhist Temple, and a Hindu Temple established in our city. My church members do not have a good sense for what these religions teach, but they

desire to know more. My project will give them greater familiarity with the faiths that surround us, and allow them to meet and develop relationships with people of those faiths, helping them to become better Christians and better-informed citizens of the world.

To be Christians who love our neighbor, we need to know and understand our neighbor and what he or she believes. I grew up in the very multicultural city of Toronto, Canada, and was surrounded by a variety of languages, cultures and religions. That seemed very normal to me to have this religious and ethnic mix. When I moved to South Dakota from State College, Pennsylvania, I was startled to see this society's predominantly white and Christian aspects. In the northeastern United States, it had seemed like Christianity and the church had been waning in influence for generations. Here it seemed there was a church on every corner and more kinds of Lutherans than I ever knew existed. When our son played recreational soccer in Pennsylvania there was a mix of kids of different skin tones and ethnicities. When he joined a team in Sioux Falls I could not figure out which kid was mine for all the blond boys on the field. After doing campus ministry with an African American Gospel Choir at Penn State University, I felt something was missing in doing ministry with primarily white students. When I was ordained a priest and began to work at Calvary Episcopal Cathedral and was assigned to work with the Lakota Tiyospaye Wakan Congregation, I was again crossing cultures and loving the experience. I learned to lead their worship service, which is a blend of Episcopal liturgy and Dakota and Lakota traditions like smudging with sage, praying to the four directions, and singing hymns from the Dakota hymnal.

Six years ago, I was invited to be a part of a group of interfaith religious leaders committed to respectful dialogue around controversial social and political issues called South Dakota Faith in Public Life. The board of this organization is made up of a combination of

leaders from a number of Christian denominations as well as Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish leaders. Together we study challenging and controversial topics like gun control, immigration, health care, and Islamophobia. In looking at these challenging topics, we seek to find common ground across our religious differences, and then seek to bring our findings to our larger community in the form of a published paper or a public forum to share what we have learned in interacting with one another about the topic. In 2017, we received a grant to offer training and curriculum for clergy and lay leaders around the state on the topic of what it means to Love Your Neighbor, No Exceptions. We have done valuable work in the community but perhaps just as importantly, we have developed very collegial working relationships across denominational and faith traditions.

Members of my current congregation who know of my involvement in interfaith work have expressed an interest to learn more about different faiths. Last year I invited speakers from our Muslim and Jewish communities to come and speak about their faith and how they approach prayer. The curiosity of congregants was piqued and they desired to know more about the faith communities in our midst. They also realized that they do not have relationships with people outside of the Christian faith. This project arose out of that expressed desire for them to learn more and for me to investigate the methods that would best help them learn and develop relationships with the people of the religions of the world.

This study focused on my predominantly white, middle-class, middle-aged, Midwestern Episcopal congregation as they learned to connect with and learn from people of different faiths. Because of the time constraints for this project, I limited the visiting presenters to four that I knew personally from our local Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Native American Lakota communities. My goal over time is to continue to bring in speakers from even more spiritual backgrounds and also to visit diverse religious congregations in our community. I hope that the

results will be a broadening of my congregation's religious horizons and that this work can be continued on a larger scale both at Good Shepherd and elsewhere.

I acknowledge the challenges and limitation of this project in centralizing Christianity and marginalizing or "othering" the various religions I chose for us to study as well as those I did not choose. The context of the study based in a place where Christianity has been majority for over a hundred years has the tendency of normalizing Christianity and making religions different from Christianity seem strange and foreign. In limiting the study to only four religions besides Christianity, I have neglected religions that have fewer local adherents and may be even more marginalized like Buddhism, Bahai, African tribal religions, or Paganism, to give a few examples. My hope is that this project will be a step in the process of broadening our horizons and our understanding. A goal of this project is to help this community in which I serve to see Christianity as one of many World Religions through which God our Creator is communicating to many people the way to live a life of respect and love for all creatures and for the earth on which we live.

In chapter 1, I will discuss the history and background of our parish community and what the congregation knew at the start of the project about the faith traditions that surround us based on the initial survey I gave to twenty members. In chapter 2, I will delve into the theories of why and how to teach interfaith awareness in a Christian community, and according to the literature, the best way to accomplish bringing greater awareness of the religions of our neighbors, and what the fruit of that awareness might be in developing a community with a stronger Christian faith and deeper relationships with people of diverse faith traditions. In chapter 3, I will describe the process of preparing the congregation for this project of interfaith education, the building of this interfaith curriculum, the presentations made by our visitors of four different faith traditions,

and the verbal and written feedback received from parishioners and guests. In chapter 4, I will analyze and evaluate what the congregation and I learned from this project and in chapter 5, I will make conclusions and recommendations for those who would like to replicate this project in their own context.

This research may be of interest to clergy and other leaders in churches seeking to build relationships with people of a variety of religious traditions. It will be helpful for predominantly white Anglo-American churches both in the Episcopal Church and in other Christian denominations as they seek to understand, develop relationships with, and cooperate with people of a variety of faith traditions.

Chapter 1: History of Church of Good Shepherd and What the Congregation Knew

In this chapter I will discuss the history and background of our parish community and what the congregation knew at the start of the project about the faith traditions that surround us based on the initial survey I gave to twenty members.

South Dakota is a fairly young state, established in November 2, 1889, and it is named for the inhabitants when people of European ancestry arrived, the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota people. With the advent of the Reservation system, indigenous people were moved to reservations around the state and the population that settled from Europe took over the rest of the land to establish cities, towns, ranches, and farms. Sioux Falls was incorporated in 1876 and was granted a city charter by the Dakota Territorial legislature on March 3, 1883.[1] After statehood in 1889, South Dakota was settled mainly by European immigrants, with Germans and Scandinavians representing the largest ethnic groups immigrating into the state. At present, the religious majority in the state and city is Lutheran, while Roman Catholics represent the second largest religious group. As of the 2010 census, the racial makeup of the city was 86.8% White, 4.2% African American, 2.7% Native American, 1.8% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 2.0% from other races, and 2.5% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 4.4% of the population.[2]

Since 2010, however, there has been a greater influx of people from others parts of the world, some of them refugees resettled with the help of Lutheran Social Services. With a growing industry in finance and medicine, the city has also attracted people of other faiths and

[1] "Historic Sioux Falls," City of Sioux Falls, SD, accessed November 29, 2019, https://www.siouxfalls.org/contactus/city/history.

[2] "American Fact Finder," 2010 Census, United States Census Bureau, accessed July 27, 2019, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF.

cultures beyond that of the original German and Scandinavian settlers. There are now three mosques in Sioux Falls, a Vietnamese Buddhist temple, and a Hindu temple which was recently built in Tea, SD, on the outskirts of town.

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd began as group of people left Calvary Episcopal Cathedral around 1954 and began to meet at Benz Funeral Home on what was then the south side of town. Retired Bishop Blair Roberts decided that he would spend his retirement helping to plant this new church, and that fall he began to visit families on the south side of town to gauge interest. By November, they started a Sunday School with fifteen children and several adult volunteers. By January 1955, the first Annual Meeting was held at All Saints School with twenty adults present. A Bishop's Committee was elected as the church board and Bishop Roberts committed to being the vicar and pastor of the church. The church quickly outgrew the facilities at the Funeral Home and so land was purchased on what was then the southwest outskirts of town and a building committee was appointed. Money was raised and the current church building was completed in 1957 with the first services in the church celebrated on Easter Day, April 21, 1957. The church grew and flourished such that it became a self-sustaining parish in 1959. In that same year they hired the Rev. Michael Canfield as the first rector and built a rectory to house him and his family across a field to the east of the church. A few Sunday School classes met at the rectory as well. In 1966, the church planned an addition on the north side of the church to provide offices and extra classrooms at an estimated cost of $68,000. Construction was completed in 1967. A large Good Shepherd Memorial stained glass window was installed in the narthex between 1979 and 1981. In 2006, a Capital Campaign was launched to make the church wheelchair accessible with an elevator and a renovated accessible bathroom. A few years

after that a new sound system, projector and screen was installed to make church services more accessible to guests unfamiliar with the Prayer Book and Hymnal.

Good Shepherd is one of three Episcopal Churches in Sioux Falls, one of which is the Cathedral of the diocese housing a congregation of approximately 250, as well as Tiysopaye Wakan, a Dakota/Lakota congregation. The third congregation in Sioux Falls is Church of the Holy Apostles which is primarily a South Sudanese Dinka-speaking congregation. Good Shepherd has been a predominantly white congregation and has tended to be more politically and theologically conservative and to use a more casual "low church" worship style than the other Episcopal churches in town. I was named the first female Rector of the church in January of 2017.

What does the Congregation Know?

I had noticed some comments at church denigrating people from other religions and places in the world as being backward or less enlightened. However, more than negativity I noticed an ignorance of religions other than Christianity and a lack of relationship with people outside our Christian bubble and that helped me to determine that this process of education might be helpful for the congregation. My hope was that learning about a variety of different world religions would make them more compassionate and more open to developing relationships with people from these religions. As a whole the congregation is open to growing in knowledge and understanding and in learning new things. Adult education when it is done between the two Sunday services has been quite well attended. The congregation is also very welcoming to new people attending our church and I thought they would be receptive to building relationships with

our speakers and eventually with people from the speakers' religious traditions and congregations.

From the twenty surveys collected, people admitted to very little knowledge of different world religions, particularly the four we were focusing on. One knew "some basic ways they worship."[3] When asked specifically what they knew of Scriptures, faith tenets, divisions and sects of the specific religions, they knew more about Judaism, particularly our shared Hebrew Scriptures, and that Jesus was Jewish but not received by the Jews as Messiah. Some knew the terms "Torah, Talmud, also has Quabalah [*sic*]."[4] Some could name some of the divisions of Judaism: "Hasidic," "orthodox," and "reformed." One referred to them as "traditional (no milk and meat at same meal)" and "non-traditional."[5]

Their knowledge of Islam was more basic: "they claim Abraham as father," "Belief in Allah, Jesus not the Savior, devoted to prayer," and "Muhammad prophet – started with Ishmael. Different sects." A few knew about prayer five times a day and the five pillars of faith. One could list the pillars: "pray 5x per day, fasting, give to the poor, pilgrimage to Mecca, the Lord our God is one God,"[6] the last sounding a bit more like the *Shema* of Judaism than the *Shahada* of Islam. A few mentioned the Quran. One described the sects as "Suni [*sic*]" and "hitite [*sic*]." One responded that "I know the least about this one."[7]

In the survey they admitted to even less knowledge of Hinduism: "Have visited a number of shrines when travelling in India and have learned some of the basics – most of which I have

[3] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 81.
[4] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 82.
[5] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 82.
[6] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 83.
[7] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 83.

forgotten."[8] "Color festival" and "colorful" were mentioned. "Many gods," "many idols," "have many names for God and statues," "many God figures – only one God," was the strongest impression. "Elephant God" and "Shiva" were the only specific gods mentioned. One mentioned "cows are sacred" and "caste system."[9] "Reincarnation" was mentioned twice and one of those who mentioned it wrote "reincarnation has been misunderstood."[10]

In relation to Lakota Spirituality, the one most familiar said he "Lived in Sisseton SD [on the Lake Traverse Reservation in northeast South Dakota] for three years. Have attended and participated in multiple *inipi* ceremonies, know the importance of 4 directions. Am familiar with the concept of *mitakuye oyasin* – the interrelatedness of all beings."[11] One had attended the "Dakota Experience last year," the training in Dakota/Lakota traditions, history, spirituality, and culture taught in the Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota. This class is required for all clergy yet is open to anyone and is offered twice a year in the diocese. The strongest impression of Lakota Spirituality was the "importance of nature," "the spirituality of nature," and "connection to creation," and aspects like "wind, earth, sun" and "'earthiness' of their spirituality," and "can't own the earth." This was mentioned by many people and related to this was the mention of animals like "thunderbird, animals are our cousins," and "coyote tales." A sense of "Belief in God" was mentioned as well as addressing God as "Great Grandfather," or "Great Spirit." Dancing and music were mentioned but there was a sense of "little formal service" in their religion.

[8] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 83.
[9] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 84
[10] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 84.
[11] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 85.

When asked if they knew anyone from these religious traditions mentioned some had close friends who were Jewish and Hindu. Some had friends and family who were Lakota. Many had no or very peripheral relationships with people from these religions. Some had teachers or doctors or co-workers from these religions but said that they did not know an active believer from these traditions very well. One shared a story, "A good friend's daughter married someone of Jewish faith. My friend was upset until her priest said, Jesus was Jewish."[12] Another shared, "I wouldn't say that I was more than an acquaintance with any Jewish people. My kids have had some Muslim friends. I know/have known Native people but do not feel that I really know much about their spirituality."[13] These responses would indicate some having relationships with people of different faith traditions but many having only acquaintance or no relationships outside their Christian bubble.

When asked what they would like to know about these faith traditions, some responded generally "any and everything," "more about their basic beliefs and history," "anything more that will be presented." One said, "Don't know enough to have questions." Another wrote, "Ignorance creates fear. Knowledge creates comfort. I want to know more about all of them." One very enthusiastically replied, "As much as I can!! How does God reveal God's self to others in other religions, the creator of all? Could there have been more than one 'incarnation' of God in this wide world?" Others had more specific desires, "would like to know how it feels to live in this society with all the negativity and lack of respect and acceptance," and "Explain Muslim differences – How do other faiths view Christianity?" And very practical concerns, "Because I

[12] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 86.
[13] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 86.

entertain a lot, I'd like to know how their faith celebrates holidays and how their diet is dictated by their faith. Why do they do what they do?"[14]

When asked if they thought exploring these world religions would strengthen or weaken their Christian faith, one shared, "Not sure there will be any change. Most people live in a bubble – Step out and broaden one's horizons. Bible demands learning about different cultures – have compassion for those of other religions."[15] One wrote, "It shouldn't weaken or test my faith."[16] All of the rest responded that their faith would be strengthened: "I feel there is no need to be threatened by someone else's faith. If my faith is strong enough why worry about it. I love learning about new ways of worship. I look forward to this forum series."[17] "As you stated in a recent sermon, 'If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves…' Knowledge creates understanding. We should not be threatened by what others believe."[18] "Knowing about other religions helps you reflect on your own beliefs."[19] And "Knowledge and thinking about new things makes things more clear."[20] Some saw the potential for positive personal transformation: It will "open my heart more to others," and "understanding others' search for God can help me in my search. l may learn that some beliefs and practices are more universal than I have been aware of."[21] "I'll find new ways to worship and be able to understand others who believe differently."[22]

[14] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 87.
[15] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 87.
[16] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 88.
[17] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 87.
[18] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 88.
[19] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 88.
[20] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 88.
[21] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 88.
[22] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 88.

One saw the potential for community transformation: “I think we find things/values we share. This brings us closer together.”[23]

[23] Appendix E – Survey Responses, 88.

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Literature Review

In this chapter I will delve into the theories of why and how to teach interfaith awareness in a Christian community, and according to the literature, the best way to accomplish bringing greater awareness of the religions of our neighbors, and what the fruit of that awareness might be in developing a community with a stronger Christian faith and deeper relationships with people of diverse faith traditions.

As to the questions, why should we as Christians bother studying world religions? And Shouldn't we just focus on learning about our own religion? We could certainly spend a lifetime learning about Christianity, but that should not limit our study of the ways that different religions approach the Divine. First of all, the Bible commands us to love those who are not like us. In the Hebrew Scriptures, in the book of Leviticus, God calls the Jewish people to care for and include those of different religions in the people around them: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."[24] If we are to love the alien, the one not like us, we first need to know and understand the alien who is not like us. Just because someone is foreign or different from us in nationality or religion does not mean they are less important. It does not mean that we can ignore or forget them. God calls the Israelites to take from their own experience of being alien or strangers in a different land and then to love the stranger, to treat the strangers in their own land in the way they wished they had been treated when they were foreigners and slaves in Egypt. God is calling God's people to empathy, to compassion and to hospitality. But this hospitality and this compassion means some vulnerability, some calculated risk.

[24] Leviticus 19:34 (NRSV).

An example of this is in the book of 2 Kings where Naaman, the commander of the armies of Aram and a non-Jew suffers from leprosy and comes to be healed by the prophet Elisha. The prophet sends him to wash himself seven times in the Jordan river and to be healed of his leprosy. It almost seems too easy for Naaman, and he becomes angry and says that his own rivers back in Syria are better than the Jordan river in Israel. But he is convinced to wash here at the Jordan by his servants and when he does, indeed he is healed. Now convinced that the God of Israel is the true God, he returns to the man of God. He wants to give a gift to thank him but when the man of God refuses, Naaman asks instead for a gift from him. He asks for two mule-loads of earth to bring back with him to his home country so he can worship the God of Israel on Israelite soil. And he begs forbearance of the Lord that when Naaman goes with his master the king to the house of Rimmon to worship the king's gods, and the king bows to his gods and Naaman, holding him up, bows along with him, Naaman asks forgiveness, and for his worship to be to the God of Israel. The prophet agrees and tells him to go in peace.

In this story, the goodness of God reaches even to Naaman, the commander of an enemy army. Naaman must leave his comfort zone of power in order to humble himself and to ask for healing from an Israelite prophet. The prophet must leave his comfort zone to offer healing even to this non-Jewish, Gentile general. Through these calculated risks, Naaman receives healing and awareness of the power of the God of Israel. Elisha the prophet learns that God's mercy can stretch even beyond the bounds of Israel to a stranger and even an enemy of his people. Naaman's worship now will be transformed. Now when he bows with his king to his king's gods, he is recognizing he is really bowing to the God of Israel and his worship is received as such.[25]

[25] 2 Kings 5:1-19 (NRSV).

In the New Testament Scripture, Jesus also commands us to love our neighbor. When the expert in the law asks him "who is my neighbor," Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, and he widens the definition of neighbor to be not just someone like me or someone who lives near me, but someone who may be very different from me, who might even be from another religion, someone we might even consider to be our opponent or enemy.[26] This works against the very grain of our national identity, our religious identity, to love someone different from ourselves, someone we might even fear would want to harm us. This love of neighbor goes beyond our very nature, to a need to see our neighbor as God sees our neighbor, as someone also made in the image of God. But how can we love our neighbor if we do not know our neighbor?

In the TED talk video by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of the Single Story," she tells of having a single story of the boy Fidé who worked for her middle-class Nigerian family. She learned that he was poor and to be pitied, and so she was surprised when she visited his home to see that his brother had woven a beautiful raffia basket. It did not fit with her single story of Fidé that a member of his family who was poor could make something beautiful. When Adichie went to college in the United States, she found her roommate had a single story of her as a person from Africa. Her roommate was surprised that Adichie had used a stove, that she was raised by well-educated university professors, and that she listened to western music. Adichie goes on to say that for those of us who reject a single story of a country or people and who realize that there is never a single story of anyone, we open ourselves up to a restoring of Paradise.[27] This Paradise is seen in the book of Revelation where every people and nation worship God together: "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could

[26] Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV).

[27] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of the Single Story," TED Global 2009, July 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands."[28]

However, the current earthly reality of our predominantly Christian nation is as Martin Luther King Jr. described, "It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, the same hour when many are standing to sing 'In Christ There Is No East Nor West.'"[29] We tend to live in a Christian bubble surrounded by people who generally believe what we believe. A bubble can be a comfortable place to live. We are connected with people who believe similar things and we can support one another as we learn, grow, and worship together. We share a kind of "insider's language" of humor, stories, and customs that we hold in common and we don't have to explain ourselves too much. But we live in a diverse world which is becoming more so every day. Marion H. Larson and Sara L.H. Shady in their book *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World* say that "Learning opportunities 'beyond the bubble' are essential for preparing Christians to constructively engage a religiously diverse world."[30] If we believe that we will all one day worship together we should accustom ourselves to that heavenly worship here and now on earth.

Krister Stendahl, a Swedish Lutheran theologian and Bishop of Stockholm, worked for much of his life to promote interfaith understanding. In 1985, when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was seeking to build a temple in Stockholm, this created great controversy on the part of a great many Swedes. Stendahl spoke to the press in a Mormon church building endorsing the building of the temple and suggested the appropriate way to treat religions other

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[28] Revelation 7:9 (NRSV).

[29] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story" (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 219.

[30] Marion H. Larson and Sara L.H. Shady, *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

than one's own, what he called his *Three Rules of Religious Understanding*.[31] The first rule is that when you want to learn about a religion you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies. The second is don't compare your best with their worst. The third is to leave room for "holy envy," being willing to look at another faith and see what we truly admire and value in that tradition, something we can learn from, even if we don't desire to convert to that religion.

Terrie Lynn Bittner writes, "These rules reflect basic Christian principles, but they also demonstrate Stendahl's comfort in his own religion. His testimony of his Lutheran faith was strong enough that he didn't need to trample another religion in order to feel okay about his own, nor did he feel the need to eliminate or blockade another religion to keep his safe."[32] My goal has been to teach and to follow Stendahl's *Three Rules of Religious Understanding* in implementing this project of interreligious education at Good Shepherd.

Judith Berling gives a comprehensive treatment of what skills are needed to better understand other religious traditions and to better navigate interreligious relationships. Berling writes on how to educate Christians on other religions and be transformed by the interactions. She delves into educational theory and the importance of gaining understanding, and not just information, through human conversation and relationships with others that will bring about transformation to our Christian faith and to our interactions with a religiously diverse world. She highlights the problem of ignorance in this matter: "Ignorance and misunderstanding are sources of tension and violence that have the potential to rend the fabric of an increasingly diverse U.S. society. The only alternative is mutual knowledge and understanding."[33]

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[31] Terrie Lynn Bittner, "Stendahl's Three Rules of Religious Understanding," accessed May 30, 2019, https://ldsblogs.com/1833/stendahls-three-rules-of-religious-understanding.

[32] Bittner, "Stendahl's Three Rules of Religious Understanding."

[33] Judith A. Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds: A Guide for Interreligious Education* (New York: Obis Books, 2004), 11.

Berling also explains the benefits: "The vast majority of Christian interreligious conversations lead not to conversion but to broadened sensibilities and a clearer, if refined, sense of one's Christian identity."[34] Her apologetic towards understanding other religions can be applied even to more conservative Christians by invoking the Ninth Commandment: "We need to respect and understand the religions of our neighbors so that we do not unfairly slander or malign them. We need accurate knowledge and solid understanding if we are not to bear false witness; genuine Christian witness cannot be based on false witness against others. The injunction against bearing false witness opens a window for even rather conservative Christians to learn other religions."[35]

James Michael Lee offers his case for the necessity of Christian learning embracing religious pluralism. "First, other religions are simply there; they are a fact of our existence. Second, such engagement enables us to appreciate more profoundly and to live more deeply our own form of religion. Third, engagement with other religions help us to correct and transform our own religion so that it can move into the future, becoming what it is meant to be. Fourth, engagement with other religions allows us to bring the fruits of our tradition to those from other traditions. Many Christians hope not only to learn from, but to share in such encounters."[36]

Berling also describes "'Threads of the learning process' held in tension by two poles: (1) understanding another religion faithfully and (2) reappropriating [our own] Christian tradition in light of new understandings and relationships."[37] The essential threads of the learning process describe the importance of encountering difference and entering other worlds, beginning and

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[34] Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds,* 13.

[35] Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds*, 16.

[36] James Michael Lee, "The Blessings of Religious Pluralism," in *Religious Pluralism and Religious Education*, ed. Norma Thompson (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1994), 59-63.

[37] Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds*, 64.

ending with one's own identity, learning the language of interreligious conversation, developing new relationships and living out one's new understanding. Essentially, "learning to love other religious traditions and their adherents rather than simply just to know them."[38]

Berling gives examples of parishes around the country who have embarked on interreligious education like the Hazelnut Connection, an ecumenical and interfaith resource for spirituality not far away from me in northeastern Iowa founded by a local Episcopal priest, Kathryn Campbell. Particularly interesting to me is their study group "Readings in the World Religions," a group of mainly women over 50 which has met eight or ten times each spring and fall since 1996. "The program's success relies on low-key, respectful, relaxed discussions that start whenever the participants are and on realistic expectations about what and how much people will read." As these lay people have engaged in learning, they moved from "naïve comments" to increased understanding of what was said on the news about other religions and cultures. Their discussions became "more informed and practiced" and their "conversations grew in sophistication."[39]

David R. Brockman and Ruben L.F. Habito focus on how the work of Christianity can be strengthened and enriched through our contact with and learning about other religions.[40] Diana Eck narrates the development of the current rich diversity of our society and the ongoing struggle for Christians and non-Christians to learn to deal with this new reality.[41]

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[38] Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds*, 80.

[39] Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds*, 112.

[40] David R. Brockman and Ruben L.F. Habito, *The Gospel Among Religions: Christian Ministry, Theology, and Spirituality in a Multifaith World* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 54.

[41] Diana Eck, *A New Religious America*: *How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: Harper, 2002).

Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook does a marvelous job of stating the importance of interreligious learning in faith congregations, particularly working toward transformation and compassionate relationships with those of different religious traditions. She develops a Interreligious Transformation Continuum that schematically delineates the variety of ways a faith organization can look at other faith traditions, from an exclusivist "replacement model," to an inclusivist "fulfillment model," to a tolerant organization model that respectfully wants to learn but doesn't want to commit to integrating that learning into all of community life, to a pluralist "mutuality model" organization that strives for deeper levels of understanding and accountability, to a redefining organization that is "prepared to rebuild every aspect of its community life to become authentically interreligious," to a transformed interreligious organization that has fully integrated religious and cultural diversity.[42] She writes that "Interreligious learning transforms faith communities . . . enlarges hearts, opens relationships, and builds more compassionate communities. The challenge is to support people at the grassroots to become better equipped for interreligious encounters. To do this faith communities and religious organizations must provide interreligious learning that builds mutual respect, and heals the divisions between members of different religious traditions."[43]

Kujawa-Holbrook also has adapted Leonard Swidler's work that deals with stages in the process of interreligious engagement.[44] She demonstrates how these stages can contribute to

[42] Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning Among Faith Communities* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 28.

[43] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 34.

[44] Leonard Swidler, *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*, ed. Rebecca Kratz Mays (Philadelphia: Ecumenical, 2008), 59.

spiritual growth through a process that "moves individuals from separation through awakening to mutual transformation."[45]

Stage One – *Radical Encountering of Difference* in which encounters with other religious traditions challenge me to face my own worldview and I am tempted to withdraw.

Stage Two – *Crossing Over – Letting Go and Entering the World of the Other* in which I decide to engage the world of the other, and I find I need to reassess my own assumptions. I find I need to reassess my stereotypes and prejudices and approach the other with openness.

Stage Three – *Inhabiting and Experiencing the World of the Other* in which practicing compassion opens me to learning many new things. I feel excitement and a deeper relationship with humanity.

Stage Four – *Crossing Back with Expanded Vision* in which my sense of identity has deepened and changed. I am able to hold multiple truths, and I now hold the other in relationship.

Stage Five – *The Dialogic Awakening – A Radical Paradigm Shift* in which I experience a radical shift in my consciousness and am no longer able to go back to my former worldview. I sense an interconnectedness between myself, the other, and all creatures.

Stage Six – *The Global Awakening – The Paradigm Shift Matures* in which deep dialogue opens me to a common ground that underlies unique worlds and unique differences among religious groups and I embrace an expanded sense of community and a greater potential for ongoing dialogue.

Stage Seven – *Personal and Global Transforming Life and Behavior* in which I experience communion with all – myself, others, and all creatures. My moral consciousness has been expanded, as has my concern for all life and I experience a deeper meaning in all relationships.

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[45] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 42.

Studying a new religion can not only give us an awareness of our neighbor, it can also give us a greater awareness of our own faith. In fact, John Paul Syndor says we have several options as we learn about another religion and do comparative theology: We can learn and leave our own faith the way it is, thankful for increased awareness. We can revise our faith according to the challenge presented by the other. Or we can borrow aspects of the other faith and incorporate them into our own. Some might even attempt to synthesize the two faiths into one, but this is quite difficult because it may destroy the integrity of one or both of the faith traditions in trying to combine them. Conversion is the final option when we learn of another faith, but clearly not one to be entered into lightly.[46]

Most of my congregation are at Stage One of this progression toward interreligious engagement and I hope to bring them to the next stage of development, to an openness and an excitement to learn about the diverse communities in our locale and to see ourselves as part of a wider concept of the people of God. Some of my congregation are at Stage Two, particularly those who are part of the book group that has been reading *Holy Envy* and *Christianity and World Religions*. They have shown additional commitment to learning more about other religions, breaking down stereotypes, and allowing what they learn to bless them and begin to transform their own Christian faith.

Kujawa-Holbrook emphasizes the importance of building relationships with people different from us as "an opportunity for people to learn about and experience religious traditions other than their own while building deep relationships with persons of different religious backgrounds."[47] Ongoing interreligious learning in community gives participants the opportunity

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[46] John Paul Syndor, "A Comparative Theology of the Social Trinity," *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systemic Theological Reflection*, ed. Michelle Voss Roberts (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 24.

[47] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 73.

to build relationships over time, it allows participants to deepen their understanding of their own tradition, and it encourages them to discover similarities with other traditions as well as acknowledging what makes each religious group different and distinct. She suggests committing to forming alliances with one or two other religious groups in the local community, "chosen either through shared history, or because they, too, would like to develop ongoing relationships with people from another religious tradition."[48]

Kujawa-Holbrook recommends a five-stage inter-related process in shaping the interreligious learning of a congregation in an ongoing commitment in which "spirits are enriched, minds are expanded, and communities are transformed."[49] My project works on the early stages of preparing leaders and the church community to articulate their own beliefs and to know the traditions and practices of religious partners so that they can move on to engaging in relationships, sharing stories, reflecting what they have learned, and discerning future action.

In Catherine Cornille's *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,* Cornille describes five main dialogical conditions that each dialogue partner must be aware of in order for genuine and fruitful dialogue with the potential for possible mutual transformation. These conditions are as follows: (1) doctrinal or epistemic humility (a recognition of one's own "finite and limited ways in which the ultimate truth has been grasped and expressed within one's own religious teachings, practices and/or institutional forms"),[50] (2) commitment to being grounded in a particular religious tradition from which and for which they speak, (3) interconnection ("belief that the teachings and practices of the other religion are in some way related to or relevant for

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[48] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 73.

[49] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 75.

[50] Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008) 4.

one's own religious traditions"[51] and dissolution of an us vs. them paradigm), (4) empathy (an ability "to resonate with the religious meaning of particular teachings and practices of the other religion that they may have an impact upon one's own religious tradition,"[52] experiencing the other as the other is), and (5) hospitality ("recognition of other religions as potential sources of genuine and distinctive truth,"[53] leading to an openness to the possibility of transformation through the dialogue).

As we progress in interreligious dialogue, I would hope that we can work toward interreligious cooperation toward the common good in our community. This will take time, relationship building, and discernment toward how to work toward a common goal of service. "Three to six months of regular community building and discernment is not too long for interreligious congregations and religious organizations interested in practical compassionate action to work together before projects are chosen."[54] It is of great importance that this interreligious learning would be "a long-term *process* rather than a *program* or *product*," (emphasis Kujawa-Holbrook's) toward a "vision of people from all religious traditions united for the common good."[55]

Eboo Patel is the founder and President of Interfaith Youth Core, doing work to educate and help people and organizations to do interfaith work. In his work, he highlights the importance of interfaith leadership in building bridges between people to accomplish goals in making a more just and compassionate society.[56] He begins by looking at the identity of what

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[51] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,* 5.
[52] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,* 5.
[53] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,* 6.
[54] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 120.
[55] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 153.
[56] Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 15.

makes an interfaith leader, how our own stories propel us towards helping others to relate to one another across difference. He explores what "inter" and "faith" mean, separately and together. "Inter" being defined as "the relationships between people who orient around religion differently" and "faith" being defined as "the relationship between an individual and what we commonly understand as a religious or philosophical tradition."[57] Ultimately the goal of interfaith leadership is to help people to develop relationships with people who are different from them which then affect their relationships with our own religious and philosophical traditions as well as the reverse. He fleshes out what interfaith leaders hope to achieve, the knowledge and skill sets required for interfaith leadership, and what intangible qualities make a good interfaith leader "truly exceptional."

Patel's work helped me to dig deeper into why I am drawn to this project. My own story of growing up in a very ethnically and religiously diverse place has let me to seek out interfaith experience as quite a "normal" thing. My own experience of learning more about my own faith through learning about the faith experiences of others leads me to want to expose my church community to this as well. I have always seen myself as a bridge-builder between different people of different cultures and religions and Patel helps to delineate some of the steps toward building those bridges. Part of that is discovering our own identity, next is examining some of the theory behind the value of pluralism, defined as "the energetic engagement of diversity toward a positive end,"[58] and then building "what Ashutosh Varshney calls 'networks of engagement,' or strong associations that involve people from different identity groups."[59]

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[57] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 15.
[58] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 92.
[59] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 63.

The value of these networks is that they "not only strengthen social cohesion and bridge social capital, but have been shown to prevent violence."[60] In my context violence tends to be a subtle form of prejudice that does not speak loudly but turns a cold shoulder to our neighbor and avoids relationship. At the core of building these "networks of engagement" is what Patel calls the "interfaith triangle" of "attitudes, knowledge, and relationships."[61] One needs to know some accurate and positive things about a religion, and this knowledge helps one to have a positive attitude, which in turn helps one to develop personal relationships with people of another religion, which then feeds back into greater understanding.

A Christian congregation might fear that they would lose some of their faith identity by learning about other religions. "Don't we need to learn more about our own faith tradition before we try to learn about others?" those with this fear might say. But my hope is that learning about faith traditions outside our own will help us to address our misconceptions of others, give us a sense of how our own faith can interact with the faith of our neighbors in a peaceful and mutually beneficial way, and as a result might strengthen our own Christian faith in a God who loves all people created in God's image. As our small Midwestern city becomes more diverse, a greater sense of comfort with the pluralism of our society will allow us to overcome fear of difference and to build stronger relationships with people who do not believe exactly as we do but may share some important common values.

[60] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 63.
[61] Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 102.

Chapter 3: The Project Process

I will describe the process of preparing the congregation for this project of interfaith education, the building of this interfaith curriculum, and the presentations made by our visitors of four different faith traditions and the verbal and written feedback received from parishioners and guests.

Methods:

This project began with library research dealing with interreligious conversations. The project sought to expose the congregation to four different religious traditions for increased awareness, understanding, conversation and possible collaboration.

Participants were invited to participate in a World Religion Forum educational series during our Christian Education hour in the Fall of 2019. Announcements were made during weekly worship services, through the monthly church newsletter, a mailed postcard, and through direct personal invitations. I also gave the printed postcards advertising the series to people in the community who I thought would be interested. I also advertised through Facebook events and got the word out through the church's website, Instagram and Facebook pages.

The sessions were conducted over a five-week period as a World Religion Forum. I taught a session on why we as Christians should learn about different religions and then I invited visitors from a variety of faith communities to teach us about their faith and how they want us as Christians to relate to them. The speakers were from Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Lakota faith traditions. The curriculum focused on what we can learn from faith traditions outside our own, the similarities and the differences between our traditions, and how people of a variety of faith traditions relate to people outside their faith tradition. Inviting guest speakers gave church

members exposure to people of a variety of faiths, it allowed them to hear about that faith from an adherent of that faith, and it allowed them to begin to develop relationships with people of a variety of faiths.

This project involved minimal risk to participants. I told participants that I would use the findings from this series in a research project that I was conducting for my Doctor of Ministry program. I let them know that their participation was voluntary and that as I collected any information it would not reveal their names, or any other identifying information. I asked participating members of the congregation to fill out and sign the IRB form indicating they knew what their participation would entail.

Prior to the World Religion Forum sessions, a survey was given to a subset of twenty members of the congregation concerning their knowledge of and exposure to other faiths as well as their level of desire to learn about other faiths. After each session I provided a feedback form asking attendees some basic questions: What did you learn? What positive aspect of this presentation struck you? What would you like to take as a blessing from this religion? and What question(s) would you like to ask? I compiled these reactions in my research. I also did some short interviews of under an hour to gauge people's reception of the information.

Scope and Limitations:

This project focused my study on my predominantly white, middle-class, middle-aged, Midwestern Episcopal congregation as they learned to connect with congregations of other faiths. I limited the visiting speakers to four from our local Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Native American Lakota communities. I hoped that the results of this study would represent a work that

could be continued at our church with representatives of even more religions as well as potentially be replicated in other congregations.

Laying the Groundwork:

I began to lay the groundwork for this project in the summer of 2018 when I invited speakers from the local Jewish and Muslim communities to come to our church education time on Sunday morning over several weeks to share on the topic of prayer from the perspective of their particular Abrahamic tradition. I began by sharing on prayer from the Christian perspective. In a subsequent week Dr. Muhammad Zeeshan Qamar, a kidney-specialist at a local hospital who is the community relations representative from the Muslim Community Center of South Dakota shared about prayer from a Muslim perspective and then allowed questions from the group. The event was very well attended with about 20 parishioners in attendance. I was pleased that some of the attendees who would consider themselves more politically conservative attended and even asked questions. I remember one question about whether Islam as a religion encourages Muslim extremism and Dr. Qamar answered well that the vast majority of Muslims around the world want the same things we want, to live quiet lives and to provide for their families and to see their children thrive and prosper. He shared that those with more extreme views seem to get more press. He was gentle, has very little accent making him relatable and easy to understand, he used good humor in his responses, and he was well-received by the group. Anne Rome shared about prayer from a Jewish perspective. This session was considerably less-well attended, with only 12 or so, mostly due to a change in our Adult Education time as we moved back to a fall service schedule. Anne is a very good teacher, having taught Hebrew at both Sioux Falls Seminary and Augustana University, and very popular classes on Judaism in the Osher Lifelong Learning

Institute for older adults. Anne is an adult convert to Judaism, is primarily self-taught but has earned a Master's Degree in Religion from Augustana University.

I suggested to our church Book Group that we read the newly-released book *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* by Barbara Brown Taylor during the Lenten Season of 2019. There was some resistance to her style of writing at first but as the group engaged with Taylor's experience of teaching World Religions at a college in Georgia, we were drawn into her story and began to want to know more, particularly more facts about the religions she taught. Taylor's focus was on her and her students' own experience with the different religions to which she was introducing them. Our Book Group found this piqued their interest to know more information about these very religions she was teaching.

During the spring of 2019, people in the community were invited to visit the new Hindu Temple in Tea, SD, on the far southern outskirts of Sioux Falls, for the dedication of their Temple and its idols of the Hindu gods therein. About ten from Good Shepherd attended and were amazed at the sensory overload of colorful clothing, the need to remove our shoes, the processions around the worship space, the offering of food, the smell of burning incense, the loud ringing of bells, and the chanting in a language we did not understand. We had no idea what was going on and there was no explanation until a woman answered my questions at the Indian meal provided afterwards. She explained that they were dedicating the various idols around the worship space and that a Hindu priest and his son came from a temple in Minneapolis to chant the prayers over each statue. This confusing visit showed me that it would be helpful to learn more about a religion before we plunged into one of their services without understanding what was happening. It also gave me greater compassion for those who might come to our Episcopal

services without understanding why we do the things we do and how some explanation from the front could be helpful.

Because of the desire on the part of the group for more specific information, the next book I chose for the book group was *Christianity and World Religions: Questions We Ask About Other Faiths* by United Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton. We also watched the DVD of the same title where Hamilton does some teaching on each religion, interviews an adherent to that religion, compares the religion to Christianity, and then states what he has learned personally from that religion. The group appreciated learning more information about the major world religions and appreciated the approachable and compassionate way that Hamilton engages with world religions. I liked the question from the Leader Guide, "What have you learned about Hinduism that you want to keep as a blessing?"[62] I found this was a great way to engage with Krister Stendahl's third Rule of Religious Understanding, and so I decided to make this question a part of the post-presentation Feedback Form that I asked participants to fill out after each session that might help them to consider where they might find "holy envy" for the religions about which we were learning.

I made a survey for a small group in the parish to fill out to find out what baseline of knowledge parishioners have about world religions. In the survey I asked them what specific knowledge they have about the religions being presented: Judaism, Lakota Spirituality, Hinduism, and Islam. I asked if they know anyone from these various religious traditions. I asked what more they would like to know about these faith traditions and what questions they might have. Finally, I asked if they thought exploring World Religions would strengthen or weaken their Christian faith and then to explain why they thought so.

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[62] Adam Hamilton, *Christianity and World Religions Leaders Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018), 30.

In testing the survey out on our church secretary, I found that it was too easy to be overly general in answering, "I know a little about a lot of these religions," and so I edited the survey to ask for more specific knowledge, for example, "their Holy Scriptures, their faith tenets, divisions/sects?" It was a challenge to get people to follow through on filling out the surveys. Even though in my original plan I only needed twelve surveys filled out, I chose to hand them out to all twenty participants at the first night of my presentation, both parishioners and guests to our church, to give as many as possible the chance to fill them out right then and there so I could collect the baseline information concerning their knowledge at the start of the project.

I invited four presenters whom I knew personally, who I thought would communicate about their particular religion clearly and effectively, and who I felt would engage the audience effectively in order to address people's questions and concerns. I contacted the speakers by email and asked about their willingness and availability to speak on Wednesday nights in September and October of 2019. I informed them that I was working on my Doctor of Ministry though Claremont School of Theology and that the focus of my project was to teach my congregation about world religions. I told them the rationale for the project: that we as Christians often to a terrible job loving our neighbors because we don't know our neighbors or what our neighbors believe. I expressed my desire to adhere to Stendahl's Three Rules for Religious Understanding. I expressed my hope that each would come and teach about their religion and what they would want Christians to know about their faith. I asked them, "What are questions you would want Christians to ask you about your religion? How would you want Christians to respond to you and your faith? Something I am also curious about it how has your faith tradition looked at other religions and has that developed over time? (maybe that last question is too big for this

context?)"[63] I asked them to let me know their availability for the dates scheduled and asked if they would require a fee or honorarium. The speakers responded with their availability and only one requested an honorarium.

Presentation 1 – Why Should Christians Learn about World Religions?

I taught the first session to help set the framework for the series and to give an apologetic for Christians learning about different world religions. I used materials like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "The Danger of the Single Story" to show how enriching it can be to learn more about others, allowing them to break out of the stereotypes we may hold of them, opening us up to a restoring of Paradise.[64] I related a Biblical rationale for relating to people of religions outside our own through the call of God in Christian Scripture to care for and include in our hospitality those who are not like us, even those of other religions: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."[65] Biblical stories like Naaman from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Parable of the Good Samaritan from the New Testament. Naaman was a non-Jew from Syria who came to Israel to ask the prophet Elisha to pray to heal him of his leprosy. When he is healed after doing as Elisha commands him to bathe seven times in the Jordan river, Naaman asks for soil, so he can return home to Syria and worship the God of Israel on Israelite soil. He also asks for dispensation when he is asked to hold the arm of the King of Syria and he bows to the gods of Syria, that this action of worship might be to the God of Israel. Elisha grants him his request showing an openness to this worship and that it might be credited

[63] Email correspondence from author to speakers, Appendix D, July 30, 2019.
[64] Adichie, "The Danger of the Single Story."
[65] Leviticus 19:34 (NRSV).

as worship of the God of Israel. In this story, Elisha and Naaman learn that God's love stretches even beyond the bounds of Israel to a stranger and even to an enemy of the Israelite people. And Naaman and his worship are transformed with the knowledge that even when he bows to his king's gods, he is really bowing to the God of Israel, the God of Creation, and that his worship is received.[66]

The parable of the Good Samaritan in the Greek New Testament Scripture shows the inclusiveness that Jesus displays when he uses a non-Jewish Samaritan as the hero of a story showing how one should love one's neighbor and who that neighbor might be. Jesus "widens the definition of neighbor to be not just someone like me or someone who lives near me, but someone who may be very different from me, who might even be from another religion, someone we might even consider to be our opponent or enemy."[67] But how can we love our neighbor as God commands, if we do not know our neighbor?

The challenge to us is to break out of our Christian bubble where we only associate with one another and use common language that only we understand. A bubble can be a comfortable place where we know one another and share knowledge, language, and values. But if we are ignoring the world around us we are neglecting God's call to love those different from us. If we are willing to step out of the comfort zone of our bubbles we might learn more about others, about ourselves and about the God "who made us all and who calls us all to be in relationship with the Source of All Love and with one another."[68]

In seeking to break out of this bubble it is helpful to know the Three Rules of Religious Understanding from Krister Stendahl and how these rules would frame the whole World

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[66] Appendix F - Presentation 1, Why Should Christians Study World Religions? September 11, 2019, 93.
[67] Appendix F - Presentation 1, 93.
[68] Appendix F - Presentation 1, 94.

Religions Forum series. We would hear from adherents of these religions, we would seek to not compare our best with their worst, and we would leave room for "holy envy" seeking to find "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."[69]

When we learn about another religion it can give us a new awareness of our neighbor but it can also give us a greater awareness of our own faith. In fact, we have several options as we learn about another religion: We can leave ours the way it is, thankful for the increased awareness of another faith. We can revise our faith according to the challenge presented by the other. Or we can borrow aspects of the other faith and incorporate them into our own. Some might even attempt to synthesize the two faiths into one, but this is quite difficult because it may destroy the integrity of one or both of the faith traditions in trying to combine them. Conversion is the final option when we learn of another faith, but clearly not one to be entered into lightly.[70] Ultimately, we need to be open to transformation and growth in our faith.

Addressing the topic of conversion, I brought up the elephant in the room of whether we as Christians should aim to convert people of other religions. I presented by thoughts, that our role as Christians is not to convert, that it is only the Holy Spirit who converts people. Instead "our role is to share the good news of God's love for all people. Our job is not to change people or to change their religion but to expose them to our faith and to let them decide what to believe."[71] As to the question of whether people who do not follow Jesus will go to heaven, I

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[69] Philippians 4:8 (NRSV).

[70] Jon Paul Syndor, "A Comparative Theology of the Social Trinity," *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection,* ed. Michelle Voss Roberts (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 24.

[71] Appendix F: Presentation 1, 96.

responded, "I don't know, but I do think that when Jesus said, "no one comes to the Father except through me," he is saying that he is playing a part in every soul that comes to a deeper understanding of our Creator's great love and Jesus communicates that love in showing his solidarity with us in our human condition, even going to the cross so that we might know that we are not alone in our suffering, that God is always with us."[72] I admitted my own humility as I come to interfaith relations, not having God and salvation figured out, but being willing to learn and have God teach me more about my own faith, about the faith of other people, and about the God who loves us all. I encouraged them in these goals: "We don't need to convert to these other religions, but I hope that we will be changed and deepened in our Christian faith as we learn what is important in the faiths of our neighbors. It will be up to us to bring our curiosity and questions and an openness to learn beyond the single story we might hold of the various faiths of our neighbors."[73] I also told them that anyone was welcome to attend the forum and to invite others to join them. I invited them to fill out the Feedback Form and to let me know what they had learned and what questions they might have.

About twenty people attended this first presentation on September 11, an auspicious day for Interreligious education because of the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C., which did much damage to interreligious relations in our country and our world. This presentation also happened the day after several tornados touched down in Sioux Falls leaving many trees down around town and several stores damaged and destroyed only about a mile from the church. People were afraid that another storm was coming, and some were still cleaning up after the storm, so attendance was low. I was pleased to see that through

[72] Appendix F: Presentation 1, 96.
[73] Appendix F: Presentation 1, 96.

advertising on Facebook and by post cards and word of mouth about half of those attending were from outside our church.

In their feedback attendees appreciated the Three Rules for Religious Understanding and the term "holy envy," which some had not heard before, and the rationale for learning about other religions. They resonated with a sense "that there is something attractive in each religious community and individual and to incorporate some of that in their life."[74] They remembered the phrase "the danger of the single story," and "don't compare their bad to our good." One was attracted "by the premise of learning differences, reflect possible blend, no need to sell out to another faith."[75] One was surprised to hear a minister say "the Holy Spirit converts, we don't."[76] One asked why there was not a forum on Buddhism. I let them know that I had not yet found a local person who I felt could teach about Buddhism since the only Buddhist temple that I am aware of in Sioux Falls is made up of first-generation Vietnamese who don't yet speak English fluently. There was a real openness to learn, which one might expect from people committed enough to come out on a stormy night after a tornado to learn about faiths outside their own.

Presentation 2 – Judaism:

I introduced this and each session with a recap of the framework for the World Religion Forum and the part it played in my Doctor of Ministry work through Claremont, as well as repeating Stendahl's Three Rules of Religious Understanding in order to encourage us to approach each speaker's presentation with openness and humility. The second session was taught by Anne Rome, who has taught Hebrew at Sioux Falls Seminary, Introduction to Religion

[74] Appendix G: Presentation 1 Feedback, 98.
[75] Appendix G: Presentation 1 Feedback, 98.
[76] Appendix G: Presentation 1 Feedback, 99.

classes at Augustana University, classes on Judaism at the Osher Institute of Lifelong Learning for senior adults, as well as teaching about Prayer in the Jewish faith the previous fall as a part of a Prayer in the Abrahamic Religions Forum at our church. I asked Anne for a presentation on Judaism and what Jews believe, what she desired Christians to know about her faith, and how to relate to people of her faith. I had some initial push back from some of my leaders because Anne requested an honorarium and we had no money in our budget for this. I agreed to pay her honorarium out of my continuing education budget. Then a leader who was not able to attend asked if we could record the session but Anne was opposed to recording because her academic work is her own and she would not like to lose control of where it goes. I let Anne know about that request to record which may have gotten us off to a contentious start, and in her presentation Anne came on strong, announcing that she would not allow recording and that people should silence their cell phones. About 33 attended her talk and since she is a popular local speaker, there were many attending from outside our church.

Anne continued with the question "Who or What is a Jew?" Essentially, a Jewish person is either the child of a Jewish mother or has undergone formal conversion, but that conversion is not easy. Tradition says that rabbi must turn a potential convert away three times in order to test their resolve and to show them that being Jewish is hard and becoming one must not be entered into lightly. Anne said that belief in God is not necessary in Judaism, what is important is what you do, "Jews don't believe, they *do*" (speaker's emphasis).[77] Jews have six hundred and thirteen commandments in Torah that they must follow as well as celebrate the festivals and feasts. Anne

[77] Appendix H: Presentation 2 – Anne Rome on Judaism, September 18, 2019, 100.

asserted that, "Judaism is not faith. Judaism is tradition," and that belief in God does not matter to Judaism because "God is a fact. No affirmation is necessary, no validation is necessary."[78]

Anne taught that unlike Christianity in Judaism "there is no sense of sin inherent in human nature. Sin is not an infection but is missing the mark, not following the Law. Always there is a sense that next time I will do better. Salvation is through following Torah. I am responsible."[79] She continued to compare Jewish and Christian ideas. While Christians believe in heaven and hell, "Jews believe in the resurrection of the dead in the Messianic Age, the *Olam Chabad*, the world to come is right here, not in heaven, when promises are restored by God in a perfected world. The wicked will not be resurrected."[80] The focus of Jews is not on the hereafter but on the here and now. The focus is *Tikkun Olam*, to heal the world now, not worry about the age to come.

In Anne's thinking, the Babylonian Exile in 587 B.C.E is the crucial point in Jewish history on which all things hinge. This was when the Jewish people experienced a "crisis of shattered covenants" and "out of this come the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings which until then had been oral tradition. This shaped the idea of the Messiah who would rescue them from Babylon and restore them to Israel, restore the Temple in Jerusalem, the Davidic king, the commandments, peace, and order."[81] This is when Torah came to be. Jews will not say they know who God is but will say they know what God wants them to do. "This is how we enter into relationship with God." For Jews "Torah is to be revered not worshipped. To be done, to be observed." For Jews, "Torah is God made flesh, not Jesus."[82]

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[78] Appendix H: Presentation 2, 100.
[79] Appendix H: Presentation 2, 100.
[80] Appendix H: Presentation 2, 101.
[81] Appendix H: Presentation 2, 101.
[82] Appendix H: Presentation 2, 101.

In prayer, unlike Christians who pray with heads bowed, "Jews pray with head up, eyes open, ask questions, challenge God to fulfill God's promises. Prayer is dialogue, questions and argument…Argument leads to understanding." The Psalms give us an example of prayer, "asking why, showing anger and disappointment, expectations, trust. Anger at God is an act of faith, calling God to account, because they believe." Anne stated that Jesus' Lord's Prayer is a Jewish prayer shown by the imperatives demanded of God "give us this day, "forgive us our sins," and "lead us not into temptation."[83]

In answering my question of what Anne wants from Christians, she stated, "I wish that Christians would stop expressing pity, that they have the sole expression of truth, that they are a newer, better model. The Hebrew Bible does not foretell Jesus. This would be like Muslims saying that Muhammad is foretold in the New Testament. There have been forced conversions, killing, pogroms, blaming Jews for Jesus' death. No one actually knows for sure who is more right. There are different ways to the same God."[84] She was curt in the rest of her answers in the Question and Answer time at the end of her talk. She refused to answer the woman who asked her about her conversion, saying she was not here to talk about that and that it was not relevant, even though she had spoken of the two ways to become a Jew, by being born of a Jewish mother and by converting. When I pressed her to give even a general answer on conversion she did say it required a lot of study, like a Master's Degree. Someone asked her who wrote the Torah and she briefly replied that it came from oral tradition. When she was asked where people could read more about the Babylonian Captivity that she deemed so crucial, she told him to "google it."

[83] Appendix H: Presentation 2, 102.
[84] Appendix H: Presentation 2, 102.

People immediately commented to me about Anne's anger and her condescending tone. I was disappointed that she used Christianity and Islam to explain Judaism, particularly using Christianity at a foil and even a strawman to explain what Jews believe. For instance, saying "Christians believe, Jews do," or "Christians believe in heaven and hell. Jews do not. At the Resurrection of the Dead, we believe that there will be a new earth." I felt that this misrepresented Christianity which requires not only belief but also action, like in the epistle of James (2:14-26) which states "Faith without works is dead," and which believes that there will be a new heaven *and* a new earth at the Resurrection from the Dead. She confused and startled quite a few people when she said Jesus was not to be found in the Old Testament and that it was wrong for Christians to look for him there. She indicated how ridiculous that would be by saying it would be as if Muslims were to find Muhammad in the New Testament. This confused people who did not follow her reasoning and wondered why she would say that Muhammad was in the New Testament. One of the questions that someone asked me after the session was, "Why does Anne hate Christians?" When I related this question to her by text, she responded in a text, "I don't know – maybe because they're judgmental and jump to conclusions? Because they're so sure they're right?"[85] I expressed to her my sorrow for the wrongs Christians have done to her and related to her that my aim in this project was to help my congregation to be better Christians than that.

Unfortunately, what people saw from the presentation was the anger and the big "chip on Anne's shoulder." One remarked that she had learned, "That Anne Rome has such contempt for other faiths and has elevated herself to judge us," and that "she attacked our beliefs and belittled

[85] Anne Rome, Personal text correspondence, Thursday, September 19, 2019.

all Christians."[86] I tried to help the people who complained to me personally to see that there was a reason for Anne's reaction to Christianity. Anne has felt mistreated, pitied, condescended to, and proselytized by Christians. She has felt the need to change doctors several times to avoid awkward religious conversations. There is a local restaurant run by a Muslim in which she does not feel welcome. Instead of judging her for judging them, I tried to help people who spoke to me about her to see Anne with compassion. Quite a few remarked, "My other Jewish friends don't speak to me like Anne spoke to us."[87] One of my parishioners bemoaned the fact that Anne did not pay attention to Stendahl's Three Rules of Religious understanding in her presentation, so at least it showed that the previous week's lesson had sunk in for this parishioner.[88] One remarked, "I would like to talk to a Jew who is willing to talk more about the tenets than about her/his personal opinions. Why does speaker hate Christians and give snotty answers?"[89]

On the positive side, some liked Anne's presentation and found it an "even-handed presentation."[90] Anne did open their eyes to anti-Semitism still active in the world today and how even their best efforts with the best intentions to evangelize our friends of different faiths could be seen as insulting. A few remarked in their feedback forms that they were surprised at the need that she related for security guards at the local synagogue and that Jews cannot go to certain places in Israel, like Bethlehem. They were also surprised by the number of commandments in Judaism – 613, and that belief in God is not a requirement for being a Jew. They also learned that having a Jewish mother or undergoing a lengthy conversion process with much study and then seeking to follow these commandments makes one Jewish. They were interested in the

[86] Appendix I: Jewish speaker Feedback, September 18, 2019, 108.
[87] Personal conversation with parishioner, September 19, 2019.
[88] Appendix I: Jewish speaker Feedback, 108.
[89] Appendix I: Jewish speaker Feedback, 107.
[90] Appendix I: Jewish speaker Feedback, 105.

importance of the Babylonian Exile that she said was crucial to the formation of Judaism as a religion and wanted to learn more. They learned some of the differences between Christianity and Judaism, the concept of resurrection in Judaism being particularly an End of Time event and that this was when the Messiah would be revealed. They remarked on the difference between "doing" in Judaism, vs. "believing" in Christianity and the difference in the ordering of the Hebrew Scripture/Old Testament books. People learned that Jews do not have a concept for Heaven and Hell like Christians do and believe that at the End of Time there will be a new earth.

The aspects of Judaism that they wanted to keep as a blessing were "questioning God – which I have done," that we should "strive to do good, be good – sort of spread love," and the idea of fixing all wrong 'now' instead of waiting for the hereafter. They admired "the tenacity and devotion to Torah," and "that doubt and wrestling with God are faith." One responded that he would "look differently at the O.T. [Old Testament]." Another came away with surprise at the important fact that "Jesus was not killed by Jews" but by the Romans.[91]

I was left with the sense that I needed to pick up pieces after this talk and mitigate some damage brought about by Anne's anger and by people's negative reaction to her anger. I was disappointed that her demeanor kept some from learning more about Judaism. I felt it was important to give people other Jewish presenters to learn from and saw it as even more important to bring them on a visit to the local Jewish synagogue to learn more about Judaism in another context.

Presentation 3 – Lakota Spirituality:

[91] Appendix I: Jewish Speaker Feedback, 107.

Our next speaker was the Reverend Isaiah Brokenleg, a Lakota priest in the Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota who pastors a church a couple of hours away from Sioux Falls in Watertown, SD. Isaiah goes by the nickname "Shaneequa" and uses feminine pronouns in what she described at the *Winkté* role of holy people in the Lakota tradition. *Winkté* comes from the Lakota word for "a man who speaks using the women's language" and is considered a third gender. Isaiah was raised by her Lakota grandparents who taught her about Christianity and about her Lakota heritage and spirituality. In the preliminary survey, the people responding said that they knew little about Native spirituality except the notion of the importance of nature, the interconnectedness of all things, the four directions, and the importance of music and dance. Some knew a few Native people, some knew quite a few, one had Lakota relatives by marriage.

Isaiah told us that the essential truth of Lakota spirituality is the interrelatedness of all things. *Mitakuye Oyasin* is the Lakota phrase that is often repeated in Lakota ceremonies and prayers meaning "we are all related," "God bless all my relatives," or "All my relatives," emphasizing that we are related to all of creation.[92] Lakota worship one God with many names. *Wakantanka* is a non-gendered name meaning "Powerful or Strong Sacred Thing" or "Great Mystery."[93] *Tunkashila* is a name for God meaning "Grandfather," *Unchi* is a name meaning "Grandmother." There is also a name for God too sacred to mention.[94] There are four main virtues or social values for the Lakota: generosity, wisdom, fortitude/endurance, and bravery. There are seven spiritual ceremonies given to the Lakota by the White Buffalo Calf Woman, a vision who appeared to the Lakota who gave them the pipe and taught them their religion. Some of those ceremonies are around birth and death which Isaiah called "the purest form of

[92] Appendix J: Presentation 3 - The Rev. Isaiah Brokenleg talk on Lakota Spirituality, Sept 25, 2019, 109.
[93] Appendix J: Presentation 3, 109.
[94] Appendix J: Presentation 3, 109.

ceremony."[95] Others are *Inipi* – the sweat lodge, the Sundance where dancers are pierced taking on pain "so that the people can have life," *Hanblecha* or Vision quest, *Yuwipi* (a healing ceremony), *Hunka* or the Making of Relatives adoption ceremony, the Wiping of Tears memorial, and *Chanupa* or pipe ceremony. Isaiah also told us some of the history of the Grant Peace Policy (1872) which made church denominations Indian Office agents in charge of reservations establishing schools and churches on the reservations and the 1978 American Indian Freedom of Religion Act which made it no longer illegal to perform Native ceremonies. She explained the Lakota view of the afterlife, that there is not real sense of Redemption/Salvation in Lakota, no heaven or hell, but "we are all called to live life in a good way."[96] All the dead go to the Spirit World, and "when we go to the spirit world we know only love."[97] In Lakota there is no Devil, although there is *Iktomi* the trickster spirit. But there is an acknowledgement of the consequences of our actions, "Bad medicine opens you to bad repercussions."[98]

The people who attended this presentation where pleased that it was less contentious than the presentation on Judaism. One parishioner complained that she could not hear the soft-spoken speaker with her hearing aids, so we arranged for a microphone for future talks. The congregation appreciated the value of everything being related. They also appreciated the information about the Lakota ceremonies like the self-sacrifice of the Sundance, the Giveaways done after a death, the *Hunka* adoption ceremony, the *Yuwipi* healing ceremony, and the *Inipi* sweat lodge ceremony for purification. They appreciated the love and gentleness of the Lakota

[95] Appendix J: Presentation 3, 110.
[96] Appendix J: Presentation 3, 112.
[97] Appendix J: Presentation 3, 113.
[98] Appendix J: Presentation 3, 113.

ceremonies and several remarked the value of the ministry of *Winke* as Isaiah described it, "As Two Spirit, you don't 'come out', you 'come in' to your role."[99]

For a few this was not new information, as some have lived in places on or closer to the South Dakota reservations, but for many it was completely new. This is significant for white South Dakotans to hear more about the indigenous people of the land since they are so marginalized in our society but play such an important part of our history. I remember when I first moved to South Dakota, I remarked in a seminary class on Native Ministry that I never saw Native people around Sioux Falls. But once I began working with Native people in my time working at Calvary Cathedral downtown, I began to see Native people everywhere. My eyes were opened to people who had been invisible before through greater awareness. Isaiah's presentation did something similar for the people attending.

Presentation 4 – Hinduism:

Our fourth presentation was on Hinduism by Dr. Chandradhar "CD" Dwivedi, a retired professor of Pharmacy who lives in Sioux Falls, a founding member of the Hindu Temple of Siouxland, and a member of the interfaith South Dakota Faith and Life board that I am on. CD prepared a power-point presentation with many visuals of the Hindu Gods and terms written out, so even though he has a fairly strong Indian accent, this helped him communicate with an audience that might have had a harder time understanding him otherwise. He also has a cheerful demeanor and a good sense of humor which also communicated well. In the initial survey, people commented that they knew very little about Hinduism, perhaps the least of all the

[99] Appendix J: Presentation 3, 118.

religions. They knew something of the many Gods, the temples, the sacredness of cows, and the caste system, reincarnation, but not in a tremendous amount of detail.

CD presented Hinduism as a "Religion of Knowledge/Nobility"[100] He told us it was the world's oldest religion, with most of its followers in India and Nepal, and with 500 or so families living in our area. CD described that Hindu and India are not Indian words but Western European names given to the people of the subcontinent in colonialization. CD described the gods of Hinduism as a "Hindu Trinity: God for creation, God for preservation, God for death."[101] The God for Creation is Brahma who is married to Saraswati, the Goddess for learning and art. The God for Preservation is Vishnu and is married to Lakshmi, the Goddess for wisdom and prosperity. Vishnu has 10 incarnations including Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. Hanuman, the monkey God, a devotee of Rama is also worshipped. The God for Death is Shiva and is married to Parvati, the Goddess for motherly love. CD also mentioned Ganesha, the son of Shiva and Parvati who is famous for being the elephant headed God. Also known as Ganapati, he is the chief of Gods, the remover of obstacles, the God for good luck and is worshipped first.[102]
The Original Hindu Scriptures were written in Sanskrit Shlokas (verses) and are called the Vedas and were written around 5000 BC. The Upveda (supplement to vedas)- the Ayurveda describes medicinal herbs, yoga, pranayam and meditation. The Upanishads describe Hindu philosophy, the Puranas simplify Hindu philosophy in stories such as Satyanarayan Katha in Skand Purana. Other Hindu scriptures are the Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana.

[100] Appendix L: Presentation 4 – Dr. Chandradhar Dwivedi talk on Hinduism, October 2, 2019, 119.
[101] Appendix L: Presentation 4, 121.
[102] Appendix L: Presentation 4, 122.

Hindus have sixteen *sanskaars* or rites in their life including birth and death. Hindus are cremated after death and mourning may be for thirteen days to one year. Shaving head by men is one form of mourning. Hindus believe the soul is indestructible and that only the body dies. The soul goes to heaven or hell or gets incarnated in new body depending on the karma or deeds in the previous life.[103] The ultimate goal is to be free from the cycle of birth and death and to achieve Nirvana/Moksha or Divine Salvation.

CD spoke about the caste system with Brahmin (priests, teachers, advisors to rulers), Kshatriya (rulers and warriors), Vaishya (business class), and Shudra (working class). He said that the caste system was more associated with political, social and cultural influences than religion in India and neighboring countries, and that the caste system is slowly disappearing in modern India. However, due to fewer opportunities for lower caste persons, CD said politicians are exploiting the caste system. CD shared some Hindu prayers with us, praying them both in Sanskrit and English and telling us that he comes from a line of priests in India. He also shared some practices of Hinduism including diet and fasting. Hindus do not eat beef and may not eat any meat on certain days or may be completely vegetarian. Hindus also may fast on certain holy days, but it is not as extended a fast as Muslims do.[104]

The group gathered reacted very positively to CD's presentation. At least five of the 30 or so gathered remarked on the fact that this information about Hinduism was totally new to them.[105] They were interested in the idea of Hinduism being "a way of life rather than a specific religion,"[106] that it was so old, dating back to 5,000 B.C. and that there are so many gods. They

[103] Appendix L: Presentation 4, 123.
[104] Appendix L: Presentation 4, 125.
[105] Appendix M: Hinduism Presentation Feedback, October 2, 2019, 126.
[106] Appendix M: Hinduism Presentation Feedback, 126.

were also interested that there were 500 Hindu families in our area. A few had mentioned that they had a Hindu doctor in the initial survey but they were surprised that there was such a sizable Hindu population in Sioux Falls. They were surprised to learn that "Hindu" was a European name given to the people by colonists and not the name they gave themselves or their religion. They were impressed by the prayers CD shared with us, "the 'OM' prayer" as one person called them, and the sense of peace, "simplicity and directness"[107] in them as well as a sense of similarity with our own Christian prayers.[108] They liked the flexibility that they saw in Hinduism and the valuing of all creation. They resonated with the concept of "the relaxed nature of worship – can't do it wrong because "right" is an individual concept."[109] Several mentioned appreciating the concept that the soul is indestructible in Hinduism and that our actions have consequences after life.

Some of the questions people had were how the beliefs of Hinduism are like or unlike Christian beliefs, for instance the belief in heaven and hell. Both Christians and Hindus believe in an afterlife, so how are those concepts of the afterlife different? Is Samsara (reincarnation) like purgatory in the Catholic concept? "Why can't Christians be more flexible?" and "What might be the Christian equivalent of castes? How are we stratifying and ranking our fellow believers in maybe well-intentioned but ultimately exploitive ways?"[110] This was the first time that I saw the feedback questions about the presentations beginning to focus back on their own religion. People also wanted to learn more about the Hindu gods and about "accepted doctrines." Perhaps in this

[107] Appendix M: Hinduism Presentation Feedback, 129.
[108] Appendix M: Hinduism Presentation Feedback, 129.
[109] Appendix M: Hinduism Presentation Feedback, 129.
[110] Appendix M: Hinduism Presentation Feedback, 131.

last there was some balking at the "flexibility" of Hinduism and longing for a greater sense of theological correctness.

Presentation 5 – Islam:

Our final speaker was Dr. Muhammad "Zeeshan" Qamar, an internal medicine/Nephrology physician at one of our local hospitals, the Outreach and Interfaith Dialogue Director of the Muslim Community Center of South Dakota, and a member of the interfaith board of South Dakota Faith in Public Life. Zeeshan came to speak at Good Shepherd last year when we did an Adult Education series on Prayer in the Abrahamic Religions. He was born and educated in Pakistan but has lived in Sioux Falls for about 12 years and speaks with an American accent and communicates very well. He presented a power-point that covered the essentials of Islam and also sought to counteract some of the myths propagated about Islam in America.

People had a fairly good basic knowledge of Islam, evidenced in the initial survey. Many knew about Islamic prayer five times a day and some of the other pillars of Islam like Ramadan and the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, monotheism, the *Quran*, the prophet Muhammad, that Jesus is considered a prophet, dietary restrictions, and that the Arabs are considered people descended from Abraham and his son Ishmael. Some of those responding have Muslim doctors in town, but few know Muslims on a personal basis.

Zeeshan shared common words from Islam like *Allah*, the Arabic name for God also used by Arabic-speaking Christian and Jews, and the various phrases calling on God that Muslims use like *In sha Allah* - "God willing," *Bis millah* - "In the name of God," and *Al hamdu lillah* - "Thanks to God." Other common words are *Quran*, the Holy Book of Islam; Muhammad, the

Prophet; *Masjid*, the mosque; *Halal,* "permitted" and *Haram*, "forbidden."[111] The Ideal Muslim Practice, according to Zeeshan is to find balance and harmonize between *Iman*, "faith" and "Rituals," such that faith acted out in sincerity leads to rituals done with honor to God that increase one's faith. "Every action should be like an act of worship as if in the sight of God" and "Muslim communities should uphold and foster a system of social justice and harmony."[112] The essentials of faith of Islam are to believe in one God, angels, prophets, divine revelation, the Day of Judgment, and fate or predestination.[113] The core practices of Islam are called the Five Pillars: the *Shahada* proclamation that there is one God and Muhammad is his prophet, *Salat* prayer five times a day, *Sawm* fasting during daylight of the month of Ramadan, *Zakat* 2.5% of savings given to charity annually, and *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca done once in a lifetime. Zeeshan also counteracted some of the confusion about what is cultural practice and what is religious practice particularly to do with women like not allowing women to drive, female circumcision, preventing female education, emphasizing that "not every cultural tradition is derived from religion no matter how commonly practiced it is."[114] Zeeshan pointed to the oldest continually functioning university in the world was founded by a Muslim woman, Fatima Al Fihri in 859 in Fez, Morocco.[115]

The primary source of Islamic guidance is the *Quran*. It is written in ancient Arabic. Other sources are the *Sunnah*, *Ijma* (Consensus), and *Ijtehad* or *Qiyas* (Wisdom). Islamic dietary rules are similar to Jewish Kosher rules: no pork, no blood, no carnivorous animals and birds of prey, and no animal that has been beaten, strangled or tortured/abused before slaughter. Alcohol

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[111] Appendix N: Presentation 5 – Dr. Muhammad Z. Qamar talk on Islam, October 9, 2019, 133.
[112] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 143.
[113] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 134.
[114] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 136.
[115] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 137.

and intoxicants are also forbidden. Permitted are hooved animals and herbivores: goat, cow, lamb, deer, chicken, turkey, all fish. Animals need to be slaughtered in the ritual of "*Zabihah*," reciting "*Bismillah Al Rahman Al Rahim*" (In the name of *Allah* the Beneficent and Merciful).

As far as dress, Zeeshan related that Islam requires both men and women to dress modestly when in public or in the presence of non-family members of the opposite sex. Some Muslims interpret the requirement for modesty to mean dressing modestly relative to the norms of the surrounding society. But the *Quran* does state, "There shall be no compulsion in religion."[116] and so he stressed that *hijab* cannot and must not be forced upon anyone. He also clarified that the head scarf alone is not *hijab* but that modesty in dress, speech and actions completes the *hijab*.[117]

Zeeshan also mentioned adoption and foster care, which are encouraged in Islam especially for orphans. However, in order to preserve lineage and inheritance rights, the child must always retain their family name when it is known as well as ensuring transparency and fairness in the inheritance and finances of adopted children.[118]

The statistics that Zeeshan gave us helped give a fuller picture of world-wide and American Islam. He shared that Islam is the youngest and second largest monotheistic religion in the world and that every fourth person worldwide is Muslim. Of 1.8 billion Muslims in the world 85-90% are Sunni and the rest are Shi'ite and other. 32% of all Muslims are South Asian, 20% are in the Middle East, 13% are in Indonesia.[119] And what of the fear of Muslims taking over

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[116] Quran, chapter 2:256 (Sahih International).
[117] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 139.
[118] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 139.
[119] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 140.

America? Americans tend to overestimate the size of minority populations and this creates fear of being "taken over." In reality, there are only 3 million Muslims in America, which is 1% of our total population. It is estimated that by 2050 there will be about 8 million Muslims in American but that will still be only 2% of the population. Zeeshan sought to counter our perceptions about Muslims by asking, "What is the first thing that comes to your mind when one mentions Islam or Muslims???" and then showing photos of angry protests, violent armed terrorists, and women in burqas. Then he asked, "What about these Muslims?" and showed photos of happy Muslim families, women with and without hijab smiling, children of many cultures celebrating, white, East Asian, Southeast Asian and African-American Muslims. His point was that we have bought into the media portrayal of Muslims as violent terrorists and have neglected to see the images of Muslims as happy families just like ours.

He sought to give us a more realistic picture of Muslims in America as patriotic. Some statistics about Muslims in American from the Pew Research Center are that they are 10% of all immigrants[120] and that we have the most diverse Muslim population in the world. Zeeshan stated that 10% of all physicians in the US are Muslims,[121] that 40% hold a college degree vs 29% for the average population. That Muslim women have the second highest levels of income and education among all ethnic groups and that the gender pay gap is the smallest among all ethnic/religious groups.[122] Muslims have a higher representation by percentage than the average population in the American military: 2% of Muslims vs <1.0% of the general population. There

[120] "A New Estimate of the U.S. Muslim Population," *Pew Research Center, Fact Tank*, accessed November 27, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/06/a-new-estimate-of-the-u-s-muslim-population/.

[121] Talib I. Karim, "Muslim Doctors Abundant, but Muslim Hospitals Non-Existent," *The Muslim Link*, accessed Nov. 27, 2019, http://www.muslimlinkpaper.com/myjumla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1440:Muslim%20Doctors%20Abundant,%20But%20Muslim%20Hospitals%20Non-Existent&Itemid=17.

[122] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 141.

are currently about 2.2 million active-duty and reserve members in the US Military. Of those 5,896 self-identify as Muslim.[123] Nine-in-ten U.S. Muslims are proud to be American.[124] Zeeshan pondered why there might be such a disconnect between the reality and the impressions many Americans have about American Muslims. He narrowed it down to three reasons: a fear of the unknown since only 36% of Americans know a Muslim and are bombarded with exaggerated portrayals in the media of "stealth jihad" and the dangers of "shariah law," the "evil actions of a vocal but miniscule minority" of violent Muslims, and the sense that "it is easier and self-assuring to believe the worst of people unlike yourself."[125]

Zeeshan sought to debunk the myths that Muslims are more violent, that they don't want democracy, and that they are trying to take over the world in a violent jihad, and that they are seeking to establish "Shariah law" in America and around the world, stating, "The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge."[126] He stated the dangers of anti-Islamic violence fueled by an "islamophobia industry" funding "33 Anti Muslim groups" with "over 200 million dollars."[127] The consequences of this prejudice are anti-mosque incidents like the Christchurch, New Zealand shootings in March 2019, hate crimes against Muslims or even anyone who looks Middle Eastern like the Sikh Temple shooting in Wisconsin in 2012. And what can we do about all of this? Zeeshan recommended asking questions from Muslims directly, Having "Holy Envy," being self-reflective and identify and confront our own

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[123] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 141.

[124] "American Muslims: Identity, Assimilation, and Community," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, July 26, 2017, accessed November 27, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/identity-assimilation-and-community/.

[125] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 141.

[126] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 143.

[127] Leyal Kalife, "Report: $200 Million Spent Encouraging Islamophobia in 5 Years," StepFeed, accessed Nov. 27, 2019, https://stepfeed.com/report-usd200-million-spent-encouraging-islamophobia-in-5-years-7741.

prejudices, and learning about the world in general and asking tougher questions from those in power.[128] The Muslim Community Center of South Dakota is doing its part by seeking to create a healthy social and spiritual environment in the community, to facilitate proper Islamic education for children and adults, and to establish a venue for interaction within the communities of South Dakota irrespective of ethnicity, race and religion.[129]

Zeeshan's was the longest presentation but got very positive response. One couple remarked to me with amazement and conviction, "We've really bought into the media's misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam."[130] In the feedback forms many people remarked how much information that they learned that they had not known before. They were struck by the prayerfulness of Islam, that suicide is absolutely forbidden, that the only war that is justified is in self-defense, and that "do no harm" is a stated value. They were surprised to learn that the oldest continuous university in the world was founded by a Muslim woman. They were surprised that Muslims comprised only 1% of the U.S. population. They were struck by the emphasis on humility, charity, and adoption. They remembered the Quranic quote, "There shall be no compulsion in religion," in reference to personal practice particularly of wearing hijab, and were struck by "The room for personal practice within a larger religious framework, not all Muslims have the same convictions."[131] Zeeshan's presentation counteracted many of the myths people believed about Muslims: that they are violent terrorists, misogynistic, bent on taking over America and the world and bringing Islamic "sharia law" to take over civil law in America. Several people mentioned his story of doing the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca and the Muslims who

[128] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 144.
[129] Appendix N: Presentation 5, 144.
[130] Personal conversation, October 10, 2019.
[131] Appendix O: Islam Speaker Feedback, 148.

come from all cultures and walks of life to do this pilgrimage together. Zeeshan shared that if you become angry/impatient during *Hajj*, you have failed.[132] Thus, he emphasized the importance of patience and humility and was amazed at how well people got along with one another despite the crowds and the waiting and the heat.

This final presentation felt like a culmination of the series, Islam being one of the more difficult religions for Americans to understand, particularly since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Zeeshan's presentation gave the congregation a sense of the peaceful prayerfulness of Islam and that the heart of the religion is against violence, despite what we might see in the movies or on the news.

In the final interviews, some parishioners remarked how similar the religions were in their focus on God, family, taking care of other people, systematic worship. "Other religions were more similar than I thought. More similar than dissimilar."[133] Although the religions themselves were not ritually alike and did not look alike, one parishioner noticed a sense of "one God or many forms of one God."[134] Except for Anne Rome who communicated "leave us alone," the speakers were very accepting of other ways of thinking and of other religions. I heard a desire for more education in this vein, with visits to the various houses of worship, and perhaps a series on other Christian denominations with a speaker like Fr. Sava Leida, the Greek Orthodox in town.

Several weeks later, the people who attend the book group were still talking about the impression that Zeeshan Qamar's presentation had made in giving them a different perspective on Islam, particularly that the hijab is not mandatory, that women are revered and respected in

[132] Appendix O: Islam Speaker Feedback, 147.
[133] Appendix P: Final Interviews, 152.
[134] Appendix P: Final Interviews, 152.

Islam, and that there was Muslim opposition to ISIS and other terrorism. They were pleased to learn about a more compassionate side of Islam and that Muslims are not out to take down Christians. They were surprised to hear about anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim violence in our country, some of it in our own city. They were interested and curious to learn more about people of other faiths, choosing as our next book to study together *Threading My Prayer Rug: One Woman's Journey from Pakistani Muslim to American Muslim* by Sabeeha Rehman, and desiring to continue to visit other places of worship in town.

Our education on world religions has continued since the official Forum. On Wednesday, Oct 23 we visited Mt Zion Congregation synagogue and had an enlightening presentation by Jan Forstein, a lay leader in the Jewish congregation and the widow of the last full-time rabbi. Jan gave us a very engaging presentation on Judaism with much personal storytelling from her own life that many found more accessible than Anne Rome's presentation. About twenty people attended, both from Good Shepherd as well as from the local community.

On November 6, we visited the Hindu Temple of Siouxland in Tea, South Dakota, one of the surrounding bedroom communities of Sioux Falls. Dr. "CD" Chandradhar Dwivedi, who did our presentation at Good Shepherd in October gave us a tour of their new temple which opened just this past year. CD answered many questions and explained the various idols and the what their worship looks like. It was a cold and icy night and so only 6 people were able to attend this event, but they appreciated the hospitality of CD and his wife as well as the president of the Temple and we able to learn a great deal more about the practice of Hinduism by being in their worship space.

On November 15-16, Good Shepherd had the opportunity to host the Dakota Experience, the training of the Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota about Native Dakota and Lakota history,

culture and spirituality and how that impacts our church today. The Rev. Paul Sneve taught the class and 20 people attended. About eight of those were from our church and I like to think that our focus on world religions and particularly Lakota Spirituality that the Rev. Isaiah Brokenleg taught created greater interest and involvement in this class.

On November 20, Jen Dreiske who is a member of Mt Zion Congregation, Assistant Warden at the State Penitentiary, and teacher of World Religions came to Good Shepherd on a Wednesday evening to teach us about Buddhism, which she also practices, making her what she called a "Jew-Boo." Ten people attended this presentation which became a delightful discussion with information from Jen and much opportunity for questions and answers. Jen also invited us to attend the following Sunday evening the Talk and Meditation led by two visiting Theravada Buddhist monks from the Minnesota Buddhist Vihara Temple in the Twin Cities. The monks visit the Penitentiary monthly to pray with the inmates and then do an evening talk and meditation at Spirit of Peace United Church of Christ. Five of us from Good Shepherd attended the teaching by the monks.

On November 22, I organized a visit to the Muslim Community Center of South Dakota for their Friday 1pm prayers. Only two of us attended this session, but we were happy to discover that a World Religions class from Northwestern College in Iowa was also attending that day and so we got to join in with that group. Dr. Zeeshan Qamar who had presented at Good Shepherd in October shared about Islam and answered questions. We were also able to hear and participate in the sermon and the prayers. I heard afterward that one church member did not attend because he feared not being well received as a visitor to the Center. I hope to plan another visit to show him the tremendous openness and hospitality of the Muslims at the Center.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Evaluation

In seeking to analyze the work of this project I look to Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook's Interreligious Transformation Continuum mentioned in Chapter 2 that shows the variety of ways a faith organization can look at other faith traditions. The Continuum moves from an exclusivist "replacement model," to an inclusivist "fulfillment model," to a tolerant organization model that respectfully wants to learn but doesn't want to commit to integrating that learning into all of community life, to a pluralist "mutuality model" organization that strives for deeper levels of understanding and accountability, to a redefining organization that is "prepared to rebuild every aspect of its community life to become authentically interreligious," to a transformed interreligious organization that has fully integrated religious and cultural diversity.[135] I would describe Good Shepherd as somewhere between a "fulfillment model" and a "tolerant organization model." There has been an interest in this topic of world religions and a desire to learn and a sense that this forum would strengthen their faith and not harm it. For a congregation of about 60, to have 20 or so attending almost all of the five nights of the Forum is quite impressive attendance. I noticed some personal transformation as people learned about the various religions and got to know the speakers but there was not enough shift for the whole church to move toward integrating that learning into all of community life or rebuilding our community life. When I met someone outside of our church they asked if I was the priest from "that World Religion church," so it was remarkable that we became known in some circles by sponsoring this topic of study.

Kujawa-Holbrook writes that "Interreligious learning transforms faith communities . . . enlarges hearts, opens relationships, and builds more compassionate communities. The challenge

[135] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 28.

is to support people at the grassroots to become better equipped for interreligious encounters. To do this faith communities and religious organizations must provide interreligious learning that builds mutual respect, and heals the divisions between members of different religious traditions."[136] My goal for the congregation was to bring about transformation, helping us to learn something new about world religions that would deepen our Christian faith and would help us to know and better love our neighbors. My hope was that this deepened understanding of others would open us up to relationships with people of faiths other than Christianity, showing us what we have in common but also what makes each religion distinctive and unique. I hope that the greater knowledge and compassion for the presenters will move us toward a healing of divisions between the various branches of religion, but we are still at the beginning of this path.

In this process of transformation I also look to Kujawa-Holbrook's adaptation of Leonard Swidler's stages in the process of interreligious engagement.[137] I have seen in action how these stages can contribute to spiritual growth through a process that "moves individuals from separation through awakening to mutual transformation."[138]

"Stage One – *Radical Encountering of Difference* in which encounters with other religious traditions challenge me to face my own worldview and I am tempted to withdraw."

This was the reaction of quite a few in the congregation to Anne Rome's talk on Judaism. They reacted to the anger she communicated and felt disrespected by her view of Christianity. They felt judged by her and their reaction was to judge her in return giving them a poor image of Judaism. The reaction of some was to say they would never listen to her again and were tempted to discard anything that she said about Judaism because they did not like the way the message

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[136] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 34.
[137] Leonard Swidler, *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*, 59.
[138] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 42.

was delivered. However, quite a few of these who had extreme reactions to Anne were very open to attending a different presentation on Judaism when we visited Mt Zion Congregation and heard Jan Feinstein's presentation there. Her gentler storytelling style and kinder relation to Christianity helped them approach and understand Judaism instead of fleeing from it.

"Stage Two – *Crossing Over – Letting Go and Entering the World of the Other* in which I decide to engage the world of the other, and I find I need to reassess my own assumptions. I find I need to reassess my stereotypes and prejudices and approach the other with openness."

Each of the presentations helped those who attended go through this "crossing over" stage. Anne Rome helped people confront their own assumptions of Judaism as being fulfilled or even replaced by Christianity. Shaneequa Brokenleg helped to break through some of the prejudice around Native people and even the very simplistic views of Native religion as simply "close to nature." Her identification as *winkte* and "two-spirit" also helped some confront preconceived notions of homosexuality and gender-non-conformity. Quite a few responded very positively to Shaneequa's contrast of LGBT people "coming out" in Anglo society versus "coming into" a sense of self and a sense of purpose in Lakota society as a holy person with a role to play in connecting the people to the Divine. CD Diwedi helped to give people a powerful sense of the flexibility and the peacefulness of Hinduism with his engaging description of Hindu deities and his introduction to some Hindu prayers. Zeeshan Qamar helped to break down the myths of inherent violence and misogyny in Islam and showed us how the media has mis-shaped our perception of that religion. These experiences were transformative for those attending. The presentations gave us the real experiences of real people and helped to put flesh to ideas that had formerly been caricatures of these great world religions.

"Stage Three – *Inhabiting and Experiencing the World of the Other* in which practicing compassion opens me to learning many new things. I feel excitement and a deeper relationship with humanity."

More than simply the imparting of information, learning the stories of our visiting presenters was probably the most transformative experience in "inhabiting and experiencing the world of the other." Anne Rome telling us about the need for security at the local synagogue, and how she felt about being judged by Christians for not being one, and not being welcome in a Muslim restaurant or allowed to enter Bethlehem gave us a picture of her life and some of the costs of being Jewish and gave us some compassion and understanding of why she might be so angry at Christians. Shaneequa Brokenleg's story of being raised by Lakota grandparents and the acceptance that she felt in that upbringing that incorporated both Christian and Lakota traditions and welcomed her to "come into" her place in that culture as *winkte* was powerful. CD Diwedi's memorable story was of him getting into trouble for telling a colleague that he was not a Christian because this was interpreted as meaning "not a good person." CD also told us of his experience of being welcomed into Christian churches and feeling like he could worship there as Hindu because he could embrace the Divine anywhere. Zeeshan Qamar's most powerful story was of going on *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca and experiencing such brotherhood and sisterhood between Muslims of diverse backgrounds and cultures, all treating one another so patiently as they lived together tents and experienced the crowds and the waiting in the heat of Saudi Arabia. These stories helped us connect with the people presenting. The stories brought their faith to life for us, helping us to feel compassion for them as people and to experience together a shared humanity seeking after the transcendent.

"Stage Four – *Crossing Back with Expanded Vision* in which my sense of identity has deepened and changed. I am able to hold multiple truths, and I now hold the other in relationship."

Those who committed to and participated fully in this World Religion Forum connected with the information and the stories of our presenters. This connection deepened their own identity as Christians who are open to and not threatened by the beliefs of faiths outside their own. Evidenced in their feedback, their Christianity became deeper as they were moved by CD's Hindu prayers declaring the peace of "OM Shanti, OM Shanti, OM Shanti." Their faith took in a new way of looking at the Hebrew Scriptures as calling them to do good in this world here and now and not to look solely for reward in the hereafter. Their faith was enriched and transformed by understanding the Lakota sense of *Mitakuye Oyasin*, the spiritual interrelatedness of all things. Their faith was impacted and transformed by understanding the prayerfulness and the choice of how to live out the pillars of faith without compulsion in Islam. They were able to hold the "multiple truths" that they experienced the power of God in their own Christian faith as well as in the experiences of faith of our presenters. They could hold contradictory truths of our Jewish speaker telling us that she did not and could not see Jesus as Messiah or read Jesus into the Hebrew Scriptures and prophesies and yet still find comfort themselves in finding Jesus there in their own Christian faith. They could hear the view of our Hindu presenter that Jesus was one incarnation of God among many, and yet as Christians still hold onto the uniqueness of God's incarnation in Christ. They could understand the Muslim view of Jesus as a prophet while still worshipping him as part of the Christian Trinity in their own practice. They could hold onto our common beliefs and values of seeking to grow in love and treat others with love and respect but also still see and value the distinctives of our expressions of faith.

"Stage Five – *The Dialogic Awakening – A Radical Paradigm Shift* in which I experience a radical shift in my consciousness and am no longer able to go back to my former worldview. I sense an interconnectedness between myself, the other, and all creatures."

I see stage five coming to fruition as we have begun visiting other congregations and had the opportunity to learn about Buddhism. The group who attended the discussion on Buddhism were open to learn and practice the Buddhist meditation that Jen Dreiske led at our church. In addition I was pleased and surprised that 4 parishioners and myself were willing to attend another church on a Sunday evening in order to learn still more from the talks and meditations by Buddhist monks. This showed a further openness to leaving their comfort zones and home base and learning and experiencing religions first hand on another's turf. They allowed this new experience of prayer and meditation practice to inform their practice as Christians without fear of threat to their own faith.

"Stage Six – *The Global Awakening – The Paradigm Shift Matures* in which deep dialogue opens me to a common ground that underlies unique worlds and unique differences among religious groups and I embrace an expanded sense of community and a greater potential for ongoing dialogue."

"Stage Seven – *Personal and Global Transforming Life and Behavior* in which I experience communion with all – myself, others, and all creatures. My moral consciousness has been expanded, as has my concern for all life and I experience a deeper meaning in all relationships."

I don't feel like we have yet expanded our sense of community in maturity and depth of relationship with people of different faiths, but my hope is to continue onto these next stages of development, deepening relationships with other religious communities and the people in those communities.

When we began this World Religions adventure, I believed that most of my congregation were at Stage One of Swidler's stages of progression and I hoped to bring them to the next stage of development in an openness and an excitement to learn about the diverse communities in our locale and to see ourselves as part of a wider concept of the people of God. I believed some of my parishioners to be at Stage Two, particularly those who were part of the book group reading *Holy Envy* and *Christianity and World Religions* who were already showing a commitment to learning more about other religions, breaking down stereotypes, and allowing what they learned to bless them and begin to transform their own Christian faith. In this experience of learning through the World Religion Forum and continued opportunities I saw more progression through the stages than I originally expected or hoped. The chance to learn from these speakers and the excitement of other people from outside our parish who also wanted to come and learn with us energized those participating and also overflowed to those not participating. We became known around town as the church who was studying World Religions.

The challenge now is to make this experience ongoing. Ongoing interreligious learning in community will give participants the opportunity to build relationships over time, will allow participants to continue to deepen their understanding of their own tradition, to continue to discover similarities with other traditions, and to acknowledge what makes each religious group different and distinct. Kujawa-Holbrook suggests committing to forming alliances with one or two other religious groups in the local community, "chosen either through shared history, or because they, too, would like to develop ongoing relationships with people from another religious tradition."[139]

[139] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 73.

My project worked on the early stages of preparing leaders and the church community to articulate their own beliefs and to know the traditions and practices of religious partners so that they could move on to engaging in relationships, sharing stories, reflecting what they have learned, and discerning future action.

At a later stage, I would hope that we could work toward interreligious cooperation toward the common good in our community, but this will take time, relationship building, and discernment toward how to work toward a common goal of service. Kujawa-Holbrook expects that this might take three to six months of regular community building and discernment" to determine some kind of practical compassionate action to that we could work on together.[140] This level of interreligious learning and cooperation must be considered a marathon and not a sprint, where we are involved in "a long-term *process* rather than a *program* or *product*," toward a "vision of people from all religious traditions united for the common good."[141] Good Shepherd has been committed to service to Veterans by sponsoring game activities at the VA Hospital and providing a monthly lunch at the Veterans Service Center for homeless vets. Perhaps there would ways that we could cooperate with another faith congregation as we serve this need in our community.

Good Shepherd has begun a path toward transformation of interreligious learning, where our hearts have been opened, relationships have been initiated, and compassion has been cultivated. We have begun to see that Christianity is not the only religion through which to see the world and that there is great beauty and truth in other ways of approaching the divine that we can learn from and that can enrich our own Christian faith. I pray that this path will be just the

[140] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 120.
[141] Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders*, 153.

beginning and that we will continue to seek out opportunities for continued growth in building relationships across faith traditions.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

I will make conclusions and recommendations for others who would like to use a similar curriculum with their congregations.

This project was a success in that we began a transformational process of learning about our neighbors' religions and how they might inform our own Christian faith. It was attractive to about a third of my congregation and it also attracted many non-members to join us which increased the excitement of the small congregation. Attendance also increased over the five weeks of the World Religion Forum indicating that parishioners and their guests found it interesting and timely. People engaged the speakers with questions and gave good feedback after each presentation both verbally and in their written feedback forms. People expressed appreciation for the Forum and for what they were learning, giving them a better picture of the faith traditions in our city and helping them to know better someone from that tradition. People also expressed appreciation for being made aware of some of their prejudices picked up from false portrayals in the media, particularly about Islam and Muslim people.

Faith leaders who are considering developing a similar project should themselves develop relationships with people from other faith traditions where there is openness in sharing faith and values with one another. It was helpful to invite people I knew and trusted to represent their religion accurately and effectively. When a speaker did not represent their faith effectively to my congregation it was helpful to have other contacts in the community who could better teach the congregation in a way they could understand. It is also important for a leader to know not only something about world religions but about the process of developing interreligious and cross-cultural relationships.

An important preparation for a similar project is to effectively lead people towards transformation and change. It is important to prepare people well on why learning about world religions is important using multiple means. In the months leading up to the project, I taught on the importance of learning about people who are different from us, and particularly people who believe differently from us, in sermons, in church newsletters, in a local newspaper column, and in a committed book group which was open to delving into the book *Holy Envy* and then exploring our own holy envy. I did a preliminary forum a year before the project to gauge and build interest about neighboring religions looking at the topic of prayer in the Abrahamic faiths.

In choosing presenters, one should consider well who would be the best representatives of their faith traditions. If you find one does not communicate well, seek out other representatives. When my first Jewish speaker who I knew to be a very good teacher and who had been well-received elsewhere triggered anger in my congregation I sought out others who could represent that faith better. I was fortunate to find two other Jewish presenters, one who gave us a tour of the Jewish synagogue and regaled us with stories from her life and one who was willing to come teach us about Buddhism, was received very well, and who is more than willing to come and teach again on many topics concerning her passion of studying and teaching about world religions. It was important to have speakers who could not only present their religion well, but were good story-tellers, were compassionate, and could engage people well in the question and answer time. Being receptive to questions from those attending and answering them clearly and compassionately was very effective.

Providing visual aids can be helpful for people. The strongest presentations used whiteboard or power-point. The power-point by the Hindu speaker helped the people to understand his Indian accent and gave them images of the Hindu gods that they could recognize

and relate to. With many new names and terms, seeing those terms written down helped people to learn them better. Storytelling also captured their attention and imagination and helped them to empathize with the speakers.

Providing a simple meal of soup and bread before the forum was a great way to show hospitality to our presenters and to our guests who attended. Our Hindu presenter had requested a vegetarian soup and he was impressed when all the soups brought that evening were vegetarian. Having some time to literally break bread together before the presentation helped to build relationships between the congregation and the presenters. Sharing food together enriched the conversation and gave us more time with one another to share what we had learned and to ask questions.

It is important to see a project like this not as a one-time event, but as a stage in a longer process of learning to love our neighbor. The education we gain and the relationships that we develop will bear fruit as we persevere and seek to learn more and to love in the way of Christ who welcomed all to come to him: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[142]

[142] Matthew 11:28-30 (NRSV).

Appendix A: Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigator and Purpose of Study

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled "What does it mean to Love our Neighbor? A Phenomenological Study of a Congregation on a Path of Interfaith Learning." The study is being conducted by The Rev. Christina O'Hara under the supervision of Dr. Nicholas Grier of Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N. College Ave; Claremont, CA 91711, ngrier@cst.edu**,** 909.447.2529.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the process of interfaith learning on the congregation of Church of the Good Shepherd during the period of September to October 2019. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the effectiveness of this interfaith education program. You are free to contact the investigator using the information below to discuss the study.

2707 W 33rd St., Sioux Falls, SD 57105, (605)929-0568, rector.gsc@midconetwork.com.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

If you agree to participate:

- The educational program will consist of approximately four hour-long classes over a period of two months.
- Your participation is intended to show knowledge and interest in the topic before and after the study.
- Your participation will consist in a short questionnaire at the beginning of the study, attendance at 4 classes during the study, a feedback form at the end of each session, and two short interviews.
- You **will not** be compensated.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into practical theology, pastoral care and/or spiritual care. Participation in this study should not be regarded as—or substituted for—therapy by a licensed professional.

Risks and Confidentiality of Data

There are no known risks. There will be no costs for participating. Your name, email address and other personally identifiable information will not be kept during the data collection phase. No personally identifiable information will be publicly released. Your personal information, if collected, will be used solely for tracking purposes. A limited number of research team members will have access to the data during data collection. Those research team members are: The Rev. Christina O'Hara and Claremont Doctor of Ministry Program.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If photographs, videos, or audio-tape recordings of your participation are used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. Your information will be stored until May 1, 2020 and then destroyed.

Participation or Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology in any way. If you do not want to participate, you may simply stop participating.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address contact the primary investigator the Rev. Christina O'Hara at 605-929-0568 or send an email to rector.gsc@midconetwork.com. This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is 2019-0406

Questions about your rights as a research participant.
If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by email at irb@cst.edu.

Thank you.

- **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant *Date*

_____
Address
_____
_____
Phone *Email*

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

_____ _____
Signature of Investigator *Date (same as participant's)*

Appendix B: World Religions Survey to Good Shepherd Parishioners

What do you know about these faith traditions? Be specific. e.g. their Holy Scriptures, their faith tenets, divisions/sects?

- Judaism
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Lakota Spirituality

Do you know anyone from these traditions?

What more would you like to know about these faith traditions? What questions do you have?

Do you think exploring World Religions will strengthen or weaken your Christian faith? Explain why you think so.

Appendix C: World Religions Forum Feedback Form

What new information did you learn during this presentation?

What positive aspect of the faith presented struck you?

What do you want to keep as a blessing?

What surprised you?

What further questions do you have about this faith or your own?

Appendix D: Newsletter Articles and Correspondence

Rector's Corner for Church Newsletter June 2019

Have you seen the TED talk video by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of the Single Story"? In her talk she tells of having a single story of the boy Fidé who worked for her middle-class Nigerian family. She learned that he was poor and to be pitied, and so she was surprised when she visited his home to see that his brother had woven a beautiful raffia basket. It did not fit with her single story of Fidé that a member of his family who was poor could make something beautiful. When Adichie went to college in the United States, she found her roommate had a single story of her as a person from Africa. Her roommate was surprised that Adichie had used a stove, that she was raised by well-educated university professors, and that she listened to western music. Adichie goes on to say that for those of us who reject a single story of a country or people and who realize that there is never a single story of anyone, we open ourselves up to a restoring of Paradise.

Coming this Fall we have an opportunity as Episcopalian Christians to open ourselves up to learning more than the single story of the people around us and to learn what the religions of our neighbors have to teach us? Jesus commands us to love our neighbor. How can we best love our neighbor if we do not know our neighbor? And what if knowing our neighbor and his or her beliefs would help to strengthen us in our own relationship with God?

My Doctor of Ministry studies at Claremont School of Theology have given me valuable training in leadership, compassion prayer practices, and Interfaith awareness. As a part of my studies I have developed a project that will help us as a congregation to grow in our love for our neighbor, by learning more than the single story of our neighbors of a variety of religions. Last summer we got a little taste of this by inviting speakers to share about the topic of prayer in

Judaism and Islam. Our Thursday afternoon Book Study has been reading about priest Barbara Brown Taylor's experience teaching World Religions in *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*. Some of us also got to visit the Hindu Temple in Tea and to see a very different kind of worship. This fall we have the opportunity to broaden our knowledge and to learn even more from our neighbors who follow Judaism and Islam as well as Hinduism and Native American Lakota Spirituality. What do the Religions of our neighbors have to teach us as Christians and how can we grow more deeply in our faith by learning more than the single story of other faiths?

The project will involve a 5-week program where each Wednesday night a different speaker will present on his or her faith tradition. It will be up to us to bring our curiosity and questions and an openness to learn beyond the single story we might hold of the various faiths of our neighbors. Everyone is welcome to attend and bring friends who are interested. For the process of my project, I will also need a small group of people to commit to attending each session and to share with me a little of what you have learned in the process. Please contact me if you have questions about the project and if you are able to help me in my learning process.

Under God's Mercy,

Christina+

Email to Speakers, July 30, 2019

Hello, Friends!

As I have told some of you, I am working on my Doctor of Ministry through Claremont School of Theology and in developing my project, I would like to focus on teaching my congregation about world religions since I think that we do such a terrible job as Christians in loving our neighbors if we don't even know what our neighbors believe. I hope to adhere to Swedish Lutheran theologian Krister Stendahl's Three Rules for Religious Understanding:

1. When you want to learn about a religion you should ask adherents to that religion and not its enemies.
2. Don't compare your best aspects with their worst.
3. Leave room for "holy envy," that is, be willing to admire other faiths and learn from them.

My hope is that you will come and teach us a bit about your religion and what you would want Christians to know about your faith. What are questions you would want Christians to ask you about your religion? How would you want Christians to respond to you and your faith? Something I am also curious about it how has your faith tradition looked at other religions and has that developed over time? (maybe that last question is too big for this context?)

I am planning on having this forum on Wed evenings this fall between September 11 and Oct 9. We will begin around 6p with a simple soup supper and then you would have time to speak and answer questions between 6:30 and 7:30. I will have an introduction on Why Christians should

learn about other religions on Sept 11 and then I would like to invite each one of you to come and speak on one of the following Wednesdays:

Wed, Sept 18

Wed, Sept 25

Wed, Oct 2

Wed, Oct 9

Please let me know if you have questions or suggestions and if you have a requested honorarium or speaking fee. And please let me know if you can come speak and your preference for which night.

Blessings to you,

Christina+

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Rector's Corner for Church Newsletter August 2019

"Learning opportunities 'beyond the bubble' are essential for preparing Christians to constructively engage a religiously diverse world."

From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World

Most of us live in a Christian bubble. Being in a religious bubble is not all bad. We connect with people who believe similar things and we can learn and grow and worship together. We share a kind of "insider's language" of humor, stories, and customs that we hold in common and we don't have to explain ourselves too much. We start from a common place and can support and encourage one another as we grow. But we live in a diverse world which is becoming more so every day. Sioux Falls used to be primarily made up of immigrants from Northern Europe and now has people from many nations, speaking different languages, eating different food, living different cultural values, and worshipping differently from us. If we continue to live in our bubble we miss out on a chance to learn from people with different cultures and life experiences. If we are willing to take a step out of our bubble and learn how to engage people of different cultures and religions, we might find that we learn more about ourselves as well. If we are willing to take a step out of our bubbles we might learn more about the God who made us all and who calls us all to be in relationship with the Source of All Love and with one another.

This Fall we have an opportunity as Episcopalian Christians to learn more about the religions of the world by listening to and engaging with speakers from a variety of world religions who live in our community. After all, Jesus commands us to love our neighbor. But how can we love our neighbor if we do not know our neighbor? We might just find that

knowing our neighbor and his or her beliefs will help to strengthen us in our own relationship with God.

As a part of my studies toward a Doctor of Ministry at Claremont School of Theology I have developed a project that will help us as a congregation to grow in our love for our neighbor. The project will involve a 5-week program where each Wednesday night a different speaker will present on his or her faith tradition. My hope is that we will bring our curiosity and questions and bring friends who are interested. For the process of my project, I will also need a small group of people to commit to attending each session and to share with me a little of what you have learned in the process. Please contact me if you have questions about the project and if you are able to help me in my learning process.

Under God's Mercy,

Christina+

- Sept 11 – Christina O'Hara on Why learn about World Religions?
- Sept 18 – Anne Rome on Judaism
- Sept 25 – the Rev. Isaiah Brokenleg on Lakota Spirituality
- Oct 2 – Dr. Dwivedi Chandrahar on Hinduism
- Oct 9 – Dr. Zeeshan Qamar on Islam

Local Newspaper Argus Leader Column September 7, 2019

Learning from the Faiths of my Neighbors

When the people of Stockholm were questioning the Latter Day Saints building a Temple in their midst in the 1980s, Krister Stendahl, a Swedish Lutheran Bishop, came up with *Three Rules of Religious Understanding*: The first rule is that when you want to learn about a religion you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies. The second is don't compare your best with their worst. The third is to leave room for "holy envy," being willing to look at another faith and see what we truly admire and value in that tradition, something we can learn from, even if we don't desire to convert to that religion.

We in South Dakota are often content to live in our own cultural and religious bubble. Connecting primarily with those who are similar to us in our experiences and values is a comfortable way to live. But of late the world has been coming to us, and to live in a bubble shields us from richness of the world around us and robs us of the opportunity to learn new ways of thinking and living.

For those of us who are Christian, we are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and how are we to love our neighbor if we do not know our neighbor? How might we benefit from getting to know our neighbor of another religion so that we might learn about them and perhaps examine and grow in our own beliefs?

I have grown greatly from interacting with friends of different faith backgrounds from myself. I have found values that we have in common but also differences that cause me to look more closely at my own beliefs. My Muslim friends honoring the fast of Ramadan challenge me to greater discipline and celebration. My Buddhist friends' meditation and prayer encourage me to embrace prayers that increase my compassion. Studying the Hebrew Scriptures with my Jewish

friends encourages me to look at the Bible with new eyes and to pray with boldness. Praying with my Lakota brothers and sisters helps me to see the connection between all things and that we are all related. My Hindu friends help me to see the presence of God everywhere and in everything. My siblings of other faiths help to strengthen and enrich my own faith and to see with new eyes the God who has created us all.

Appendix E: World Religions Survey Responses

What do you know about these faith traditions? Be specific. E.g. their Holy Scriptures, their faith tenets, divisions/sects?

A bit but would like to learn more. Some basic ways they worship.

I know that we have more commonality than it appears on the surface.

I know some of the basics, but mostly what I've recently learned from Barbara Brown Taylor book.

Little. I haven't read Holy Envy yet.

Nothing really.

- **Judaism**

Torah, Talmud, Old Testament – aware of some of the holidays and some of the divisions (Hasidic)

Know their scriptures.

Orthodox, reformed, Yahwe [*sic*], Torah, Talmud, also has Quabalah [*sic*], Temple Mount, next year in Jerusalem.

Use the OT, Torah.

I don't know a lot – I value their long existence, Scriptures, rituals.

Very elementary.

Jesus was a prophet – not son of God, several sects.

Jesus prophet – very different sects – insular.

Torah, Jesus was a Jew, of course, the Jews awaited a coming Messiah, one of the 3 monotheistic religions along with Christianity and Islam.

Abraham covenant with God, Law of Moses, 12 Tribes of Israel, Levies were priests waiting for the Messiah, many "laws" of rules to adhere to, High Priest enters holy of holies, only one allowed.

Use Old Testament but not New – they don't believe that Jesus was anything other than a zealot or troublemaker.

Orthodox and Traditional (no milk and meat at same meal), non-traditional

- **Islam**

I know the least about this one. Am aware of the divisions in the Islamic world that have led to many of the struggles in the Mideast.

Read a book called "Questions you have about Islam."

Based on O.T. both Judaism and Islam have dietary restrictions, dress code, prayer times

Know they claim Abraham as father.

Suni [*sic*], hitite [*sic*], travel to Mecca and Medina at least once, Allah, Ramadan.

Belief in Allah, Jesus not the Savior, devoted to prayer.

I've learned that some of their beliefs and values are similar to Christian values and beliefs, e.g. Love for Mary. I value their faithfulness to prayer and fasting.

Mohammed prophet – started with Ishmael. Different sects.

5x a day prayer, Jesus prophet.

Quran, have five major tenants [*sic*], also one of the monotheistic religions, Mohammed is not their God, he speaks for God. Pray 5x per day, fasting, give to the poor, pilgrimage to Mecca, the Lord our God is one God.

Mohammad, 5 pillars of faith, pray daily.

One approved version of Quran

- **Hinduism**

Have visited a number of shrines when travelling in India and have learned some of the basics – most of which I have forgotten.

Very little.

Color festival, elephant God, Shiva, many Gods.

Not much.

Many God figures – only one God.

Colorful. Many idols.

Have many names for God and statues, images, temples, reincarnation has been misunderstood.

Cows are sacred, caste system, reincarnation.

- **Lakota Spirituality**

Lived in Sisseton SD for three years. Have attended and participated in multiple *inipi* ceremonies, know the importance of 4 directions. Am familiar with the concept of *mitakuye oyasin* – the interrelatedness of all beings.

Attended the Dakota Experience last year.

Importance of nature used in expression.

Very little.

Thunderbird, animals are our cousins, spirit journeys, coyote tales.

Wind, Earth, Sun - ?

They have such a deep sense of and connection to creation. I really like their dancing; the "earthiness" of their spirituality.

Basic.

Belief in God.

Dance and music with little formal service.

Great Grandfather, can be a way of addressing God, spirituality of nature.

Great Spirit, worship with the 4 directions, can't own the earth, worship of the seasons.

Closely tied to nature.

Do you know anyone from these traditions?

Close friends with whom we travel often are Jewish – as well as my neice's future husband.

Have travelled with Hindu friends. Know numerous people from Lakota/Dakota tradition.

Yes. Islam and Hindu and Lakota.

Yes, Fr Martin Brokenleg – Lakota.

I don't know anyone from these traditions except maybe in a peripheral way.

A former co-worker practiced Judaism.

No one very well who is active believer.

Yes, all of them.

Not intimately! My physician practices Islam. Very devout. Another physician is Hindu. My college prof in religion converted from Judaism to Lutheran and then back to Judaism. A good friend's daughter married someone of Jewish faith. My friend was upset until her priest said, Jesus was Jewish.

Only 2.

Yes - Judaism – my best friend from college. Yes – Lakota – my in-laws, my neighbors, my husband and his family.

Lakota spirituality – yes.

Yes, Lakota.

A few Native Americans and a few Islamic doctors.

Jewish, Islam – my former son-in-law's family is Lebanese, Hinduism, many with Lakota spirituality.

Yes.

I wouldn' say that I was more than an acquaintance with any Jewish people. My kids had some Muslim friends. I know/have known Native people but do not feel that I really know much about their spirituality.

What more would you like to know about these faith traditions? What questions do you have?

Any and everything.

Ignorance creates fear. Knowledge creates comfort. I want to know more about all of them.

Where the scriptures of each intersect. Basic beliefs.

Don't know enough to have questions.

It has been a long time since I have studied world religions and I have forgotten majority of the specific tenets. I want to broaden my understanding. The world is more connected all the time, and it's important to be a learner.

I am interested in learning anything about them. Would like to know how it feels to live in this society with all the negativity and lack of respect and acceptance.

Do Jewish people consider all that geopolitical nation of Israel does, follows their scriptures – beating swords into plowshares, welcoming the alien.

More about their basic beliefs and history.

Anything more that will be presented.

How different are they from Christianity? How similar?

Explain Muslim differences – How do those of other faiths view Christianity?

How they relate to Christianity and how I can have holy envy.

As much as I can!! How does God reveal God's self to others in other religions, the creator of all. *Could there have been more than one "incarnation" of God in this wide world?

Because I entertain a lot, I'd like to know how their faith celebrates holidays and how their diet is dictated by their faith. Why do they do what they do?

Do you think exploring World Religions will strengthen or weaken your Christian faith? Explain why you think so.

I think it would strengthen my faith. I feel there is no need to be threatened by someone else's faith. If my faith is strong enough why worry about it. I love learning about new ways of worship. I look forward to this forum series.

Strengthen. As you stated in a recent sermon, "If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves…" Knowledge creates understanding. We should not be threatened by what others believe.

Knowing about other religions helps you reflect on your own beliefs.

Not sure there will be any change. Most people live in a bubble – Step out and broaden one's horizons. Bible demands learning about different cultures – have compassion for those of other religions.

Strengthen. Knowledge and thinking about new things makes things more clear.

I think strengthen it, but open my heart more to others.

It shouldn't weaken or test my faith.

Strengthen – understanding others' search for God can help me in my search. l may learn that some beliefs and practices are more universal than I have been aware of.

Strengthen, because that is what happened while studying them during confirmation at a United Methodist Church.

Based on what I've learned from you and Sister Jean it has to strengthen it. Learn. I want to learn and grow. Years ago the book Joshua by Frank Girzone was a wonderful novel exposing me to different religions was helpful. All about Jesus though.

Strengthen. We share a common creation. We are all created with a transcendent dimension. We are all "seekers." We need one another.

Strengthen – there is much commonality amongst all of us.

Strengthen. Adds to my knowledge base, I hope.

Strengthen. Knowledge = Understanding.

Strengthen. I'll find new ways to worship and be able to understand others who believe differently.

Strengthen. Definitely. Enlarges Christian faith. Diana Eck's work changed my life, "From Bozeman to Banaras" and much other reading about World religions since my retirement.

Strengthen.

Strengthen – a fuller understanding of other faiths will I believe, deepen my own Christian faith.

I think I will want to research more of the background and history of things we do and why.

I think we find things/valued we share. This brings us closer together.

It may lead me to explore my faith more fully – to strengthen it.

Yes, obtaining more appreciation.

Appendix F: Presentation 1 - Why Should Christians Study World Religions? Sept 11, 2019

In the TED talk video by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of the Single Story"? Adichie tells of having a single story of the boy Fidé who worked for her middle-class Nigerian family. She learned that he was poor and to be pitied, and so she was surprised when she visited his home to see that his brother had woven a beautiful raffia basket. It did not fit with her single story of Fidé that a member of his family who was so poor could make something so beautiful. When Adichie went to college in the United States, she found that her American roommate had a single story of her as a person from Africa. Her roommate was surprised that Adichie had used a stove, that she was raised by well-educated university professors, and that she listened to western music. Adichie goes on to say that for those of us who reject a single story of a country or people and who realize that there is never a single story of anyone, we can open ourselves up to a restoring of Paradise.

In our Fall World Religions Forum here at Church of the Good Shepherd we have an opportunity to open ourselves up to learning more than the single story of the people around us and to learn what the religions of our neighbors have to teach us. As we learn about the Religions of our neighbors here in Sioux Falls we can start to understand our similarities and our differences, and more importantly we can start to build relationships with our neighbors as we begin to understand better their world view, how they think and see and respond to the world.

But why should we as Christians bother studying world religions? Shouldn't we just focus on learning about our own religion? We could certainly spend a lifetime learning more about Christianity. That's kind of the story of my life, anyway. But why learn about other religions? Well, first of all the Bible commands us to love those who are not like us. In the Hebrew Scriptures in the book of Leviticus 19:34 (NRSV) calls the Jewish people to care for and

include those of different religions of the people around them: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." If we are to love the alien, the one not like us, we first need to know and understand the alien who is not like us. Just because someone is foreign or different from us in nationality and religion does not mean they are less important. It does not mean that we can ignore or forget them. God calls the Israelites to take from their own experience of being alien or strangers in a different land and then to love the stranger, to treat the strangers in their own land in the way they wished they had been treated when they were foreigners and slaves in Egypt. God is calling God's people to empathy, to compassion and to hospitality. But this hospitality, this compassion means some vulnerability, some calculated risk.

An example of this is in the book of 2nd Kings where Naaman, the commander of the armies of Aram and a non-Jew suffers from leprosy and comes to be healed by the prophet Elisha. The prophet sends him to wash himself seven times in the Jordan river and to be healed of is leprosy. It almost seems too easy for Naaman and he becomes angry and says that his own rivers back in Syria are better than this Jordan river in Israel. But he is convinced to do it by his servants and when he does, indeed he is healed. Now convinced that the God of Israel is the true God, he returns to the man of God. He wants to give a gift to thank him but when the man of God refuses, Naaman asks instead for a gift. He asks for two mule-loads of earth to bring back with him to his home country so he can worship the God of Israel on Israelite soil. And he begs forbearance of the Lord that when Naaman goes with his master the king to the house of Rimmon to worship the king's gods, and the king bows to his gods and Naaman, holding him up, bows along with him, Naaman asks forgiveness and for his worship to be to the God of Israel. And the prophet tells him to go in peace. In this story, the goodness of God reaches even to

Naaman, the commander of an enemy army. Naaman must leave his comfort zone of power in order to humble himself and to ask for healing from an Israelite prophet. And the prophet must leave his comfort zone to offer healing even to this gentile general. And through these calculated risks, Naaman receives healing and awareness of the power of the God of Israel. And Elisha learns that God's mercy can stretch even beyond the bounds of Israel to a stranger and even an enemy of his people. And Naaman's worship now will be transformed. Now when he bows with his king to his king's gods, he is recognizing he is really bowing to the God of Israel and his worship is forgiven and received.

Also in the New Testament Scripture Jesus commands us to love our neighbor. And when the expert in the law asks him "who is my neighbor," he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan and he widens the definition of neighbor to be not just someone like me or someone who lives near me, but someone who may be very different from me, who might even be from another religion, someone we might even consider to be our opponent or enemy. This works against the very grain of our national identity, our religious identity, to love someone different from ourselves, someone we might even fear might want to harm us. This love of neighbor goes beyond our very nature, to a need to see our neighbor as God sees our neighbor, as someone also made in the image of God. But how can we love our neighbor if we do not know our neighbor?

The challenge is that most of us live in a Christian bubble. Being in a religious bubble is not all bad. We connect with people who believe similar things and we can learn and grow and worship together. We share a kind of "insider's language" of humor, stories, and customs that we hold in common and we don't have to explain ourselves too much. We start from a common place and can support and encourage one another as we grow. But we live in a diverse world which is becoming more so every day. Sioux Falls used to be primarily made up of immigrants

from Northern Europe and now has people from many nations, speaking different languages, eating different food, living different cultural values, and worshipping differently from us. If we continue to live in our bubble we miss out on a chance to learn from people with different cultures and life experiences. If we are willing to take a step out of our bubble and learn how to engage people of different cultures and religions, we might find that we learn more about ourselves as well. If we are willing to take a step out of our bubbles we might learn more about the God who made us all and who calls us all to be in relationship with the Source of All Love and with one another.

So how do we break out of our bubble? In the 1980s the people of Stockholm were feeling their bubble breaking. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (sometimes known as the Mormons) were building a Temple in the middle of Stockholm and the people were concerned at how this would affect their city and their Lutheran culture. In the midst of this crisis, Krister Stendahl, a Swedish Lutheran Bishop, came up with *Three Rules of Religious Understanding* to help the people begin to engage with people of different faiths: The first rule is that when you want to learn about a religion you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies. The second rule is don't compare your best with their worst. The third rule is to always leave room for "holy envy," being willing to look at another faith and see what you truly admire and value in that tradition, something you can learn from, even if you don't desire to convert to that religion. I've phrased it on your feedback forms as "What do you want to keep as a blessing" from this new religion?

Studying a new religion can not only give us an awareness of our neighbor, it can also give us a greater awareness of our own faith. In fact, we have several options as we learn about another religion: We can learn and leave our own faith the way it is, thankful for increased

awareness. We can revise our faith according to the challenge presented by the other. Or we can borrow aspects of the other faith and incorporate them into our own. Some might even attempt to synthesize the two faiths into one, but this is quite difficult because it may destroy the integrity of one or both of the faith traditions in trying to combine them. Conversion is the final option when we learn of another faith, but clearly not one to be entered into lightly.

I love the story that Murray Harr tells of teaching about Judaism to his mostly Christian students at Augustana. One of the students came to him after class and said that after learning about Judaism that she would like to convert. Murray asked her what her own religious tradition was and she replied that she had grown up in the Methodist church but had found it dull and boring and not applicable to her life. Judaism and what she had learned about it truly excited her. To her surprise, Murray gave her assignment, although as a religion teacher I don't know why she didn't expect that! He told her to go back to her own tradition first and to learn more about Methodism and then to come to him if she still felt called to convert. She reported back to him after several months that now that she had studied her own faith tradition with the same zeal and intellectual curiosity with which she had approached learning about a new one, she became convinced that she wanted to remain a Methodist and even go to seminary to become a Methodist pastor. Anne Rome next week will have a different story about her own engagement with learning about Judaism that led to conversion, or she might say, finding out what she really was all along.

And a word about conversion: Don't we as Christians aim to convert people of other religions or shouldn't that be our aim? What is the command of Jesus? "To go into all the world and make disciples, teaching them everything I have taught you, and baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." So I would say that our role as Christians is not to

convert. It is only God's Holy Spirit who converts people. Our role is to share the good news of God's love for all people. Our job is not to change people or to change their religion but to expose them to our faith and to let them decide what to believe. Will people who don't follow Jesus not go to heaven? I don't know, but I do think that when Jesus said, "no one comes to the Father except through me," he is saying that he is playing a part in every soul that comes to a deeper understanding of our Creator's great love and he communicates that love is showing his solidarity with us in our human condition, even going to the cross so that we might know that we are not alone in our suffering, that God is always with us. So perhaps the more I know and learn about my own faith, the more I realize what I don't know. The more I study and pray and learn, I realize that God is Mystery and that once we think we have God or salvation figured out, we really don't. So I come to interfaith relations with humility and a desire to learn. I come with a desire for God to teach me more about my own faith and about the people of the world and the God who loves us all unconditionally.

As I enter the third year of my Doctor of Ministry studies at Claremont School of Theology, I am grateful for the valuable training in leadership, compassion prayer practices, and Interfaith awareness that my studies have given me. As a part of my studies in this third year I hope that I have developed a project that will help us as a congregation to grow in our love for our neighbor, by learning more than the single story of our neighbors of a variety of religions. We have progressed through a number of stages in preparation for this Forum. Last summer we got a little taste of this by inviting speakers to share about the topic of prayer in the Abrahamic Religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. During Lent, our Thursday afternoon Book Study read about priest Barbara Brown Taylor's experience teaching World Religions in *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*. Then we decided to read Adam Hamilton's book

Christianity and World Religions: Questions We Ask About Other Faiths to give us more information about world religions themselves. Some of us also got to visit the Hindu Temple in Tea and to see a very different kind of worship and are interested in visiting more houses of faith in our community. In this forum we have the opportunity to broaden our knowledge further and to learn from our neighbors who follow Judaism and Islam as well as Hinduism and Native American Lakota Spirituality. What do the Religions of our neighbors have to teach us as Christians so that we can grow more deeply in our faith and love by learning more than the single story of other faiths?

The project will involve a 5-week program where each Wednesday night a different speaker will present on his or her faith tradition. Using Krister Stendahl's Three Rules of Interreligious Understanding we will hear from adherents of these religions instead of from their opponents. I hope we will aim not to compare our best with their worst, but to hear their representations of their own faiths with an open mind and to engage our speakers with our honest questions about those faiths. I also hope that we will leave room for "holy envy," looking to those things that we can admire about these religions. Everyone is welcome to attend and to bring friends who are interested. If you can't come to all of our forum, please do come to some of it. And please ask me if you have qualms or questions about the project and if you are able to help me in my learning process by sharing what you are learning or of what you would like to learn more. All the questions might not apply after this presentation but I would love it if you would fill out the feedback form.

Appendix G: Feedback to Presentation 1 - Why Should Christians Study World Religions?

What new information did you learn during this presentation?

The three rules for studying other religions.

I had not heard the term Holy Envy.

I love the three criteria for inter-religious understanding.

I liked the 3 rules of inter-faith engagement.

Halal?

Acceptance of others through faith.

The rationale for learning about new other religions.

What positive aspect of the faith presented struck you?

Who is being saved? We're not the judge.

The premise of learning differences, reflect possible blend, no need to sell out to another faith.

Three tenats.

All-encompassing acceptance.

What do you want to keep as a blessing?

The good reminder of Holy Envy.

Commonality of Faith.

That there is something attractive in each religious community and individual and to incorporate some of that in my life.

My need to reflect on tonight's info.

Remember the phrase, "the danger of the single story."

Being “different” is not bad. Don’t compare “their bad” to “our good.”

Open mind and heart.

What surprised you?

To hear a minister say the Holy Spirit converts, we don’t.

Nothing really – liked the examples you used.

What further questions do you have about this faith or your own?

Why no Buddhist on your list of faith speakers?

Appendix H: Anne Rome – Author's Notes from talk on Judaism - Sept 18, 2019

Who or What is a Jew? A Jew is product of a Jewish mother or a formal conversion.

Jews don't seek converts, there is no need for anyone to be or become Jewish.

Any religion that encourages you to be with people in pain and to be a person of good character is enough.

A Rabbi will be required to turn you away three times if you seek to convert.

Being Jewish is hard. As a Jew you will be strange and hated. This is not be entered into lightly.

Belief in God? In Judaism this is not necessary, there is no prohibition against atheism.

What is important says Rabbi Hillel is to DO unto others. Jews don't believe, they DO…

- Torah
- commandments, 613 of them
- celebrate the festivals and feasts

Judaism is not faith. Judaism is tradition.

God is a fact. No affirmation is necessary, no validation is necessary.

In Judaism there is no sense of sin inherent in human nature. Sin is not an infection but is missing the mark, not following the Law. Always there is a sense that next time I will do better. Salvation is through following Torah. I am responsible.

Heaven and Hell are Christian ideas. Jews believe in the resurrection of the dead in the Messianic Age – the *Olam Chabad* – the world to come right here not in heaven – when promises are restored by God, the perfected world. The wicked will not be resurrected.

Jerusalem will always be the Promised Land.

Tikkun Olam – heal this world now is the focus, not worry about the next.

587 BCE – Babylonian Exile – crisis of shattered covenants for the Jewish people. Out of this come the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings which until then had been oral tradition. This shaped the idea of the Messiah who would rescue them from Babylon and restore them to Israel, restore the Temple in Jerusalem, the Davidic king, the commandments, peace, and order.

Jews won't say they know who God is, but will say they know what God wants us to do. This is how we enter into relationship with God.

Zohar says – God, Israel, and Torah are one. Torah is God made flesh, not Jesus.

Torah is to be revered not worshipped. To be done, to be observed.

Prayer - Jews pray with head up, eyes open, ask questions, challenge God to fulfill God's promises. Prayer is dialogue, questions and argument. Man is created in the image of God. Pleas from one side, commands from the other. Argument leads to understanding.

Psalms show us prayer, asking why, showing anger and disappointment, expectations, trust.

Anger at God is an act of faith, calling God to account, because they believe.

The Lord's Prayer is a Jewish prayer – imperatives demand of God "give us this day," "Forgive us our sins," "lead us not into temptation."

I wish that Christians would stop expressing pity, that they have the sole expression of truth, that they are a newer, better model. The Hebrew Bible does not foretell Jesus. This would be like

Muslims saying that Muhammad is foretold in the New Testament. There have been forced conversions, killing, pogroms, blaming Jews for Jesus' death. No one actually knows for sure who is more right. There are different ways to the same God.

Q&A – Who wrote Torah? – came from oral tradition.

Jewish "movements" – Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox

- Conservative
- Reform
- Reconstruction

Conversion – much study is necessary, like a Masters' degree

Appendix I: Jewish Presentation Feedback

What new information did you learn during this presentation?

Everything to do with Babylonian [exile].

Jews do not want converts.

Jews do – 613 commandments more important than belief. You are considered Jewish only if your mother was Jewish.

Actually, I learned a lot. The whole Babylonian thing. The different order of scripture. Just very thought provoking.

Religious Jews believe in God. 613 Commandments.

Babylonian exile, Torah, 613 commandments, don't worship but do, Abraham, David, first 5 books of the Bible, Mohammed.

Formal and lengthy conversion process. Security at synagogues. No requirement of belief in God to be a part of Judaism. 613 commandments. Differing concepts of resurrection.

613 commandments = dogma to me.

Loved your even-handed presentation of different faiths.

That you don't need to believe in God to be Jewish, not required. Jews are not cremated.

Prior I had no knowledge of Judaism.

Not believing in any God.

Security. Belief is not required. 3 denials.

613 commandments. Loved the tolerance of the Jewish.

Jews don't go after converts, no creeds or faith tenets, practices vs beliefs, sin isn't an act which needs to be saved (not inherent), resurrection to a perfect world here upon the coming of the Messiah. Doing – practicing the law.

Review – I am old and forget things.

Judaism is not about belief but about doing.

That Jews cannot go certain places in Israel – Bethlehem.

The approach to the philosophers.

That Anne Rome has such contempt for other faiths and has elevated herself to judge us.

What positive aspect of the faith presented struck you?

Devotion of Jews to 613 commandments when I have a hard time with 10!

613 commandments.

The consistent ability of Jews to challenge God and the comfort of belief and challenge co-existing.

The "doing" is all-important.

The whole understanding of God and messiah.

Torah.

Having conversation with God instead of worshipping.

God as a fact, even without affirmation. Questions as a form of prayer.

The important thing in a relationship with God is action.

Liked the "passive pity" thought right on!

Following the Torah saves Jews from "sin." Ask to be admitted but denied three times.

Do good, be a better person.

Action.

Do unto others.

Tolerance.

My beliefs are meaningless if I don't live them (Practice them). That is a similarity that makes a lot of sense to me in any faith.

Doing Torah. Just accepting God as we accept air to breathe.

Resilience.

The doing is where we Christians fall down – we get goofed up about works righteousness.

Jews do, doing are big into tradition.

That the answer to everything is the Babylonian Exile.

NOTHING.

What do you want to keep as a blessing?

Questioning God – which I've done.

That Jews, along with all of us, should strive to do good, be good – sort of spread Love.

To look differently at the O.T.

Their faith.

Mo. O'Hara works as an educator as well as a leader.

Belief vs. doing. "Next time I will do better." Religions as vectors to God.

Nothing I heard tonight – will have to do more research myself.

Talks in this room may have a wider version of different faiths/religions.

That Jews are here to fix all wrong "now."

All religions want people to do good to others.

God is –

Allow others to be.

Comfort is a big part of my faith. I cherish the grace of God and the blessing of the resurrection.

These "comforts" are important to me living a happy life.

I could pull things out to strengthen my own faith.

The tenacity and devotion to Torah.

The doctrines, dogmas, etc. are not faith. That doubt and wrestling with God are faith.

My beliefs.

The difference between Jews and Christian and Muslims.

I found nothing Anne said about Judaism as a blessing – what I want to keep is that it's a blessing that Anne doesn't come to our church.

What surprised you?

Jewish synagogues even in Sioux Falls need security!

God is a fact – new affirmation.

That you don't have to believe to be a Jew – that Jews believe only resurrection comes when Messiah comes. No heaven/no hell in between. Jerusalem is destination.

Belief in Jesus?

Three times to be refused and they don't encourage recruiting. The novelty and negativity towards Jews.

"Torah" = you will hit the mark. The importance of the Babylonian exile.

How obnoxious the speaker was. Appeared to have a real chip on her shoulder regarding Christians and her message was tainted by her bias.

Torah info.

Their prayers are in questions.

613 commandments and Torah.

Jesus was not killed by Jews.

Resurrection at the Messiah, this world perfected (promised land). No one knows for sure.

Questioning God is prayer.

Conversion.

Need to learn about the Babylonian Exile.

Anne not being able to go into certain restaurants in SF! The reference to Mohammed in John 14!!!

I thought at first Anne was angry about her religion – but later her humor was very disarming.

The birthright makes one a Jewish member.

Differences/similarity in the Torah and Old Testament.

I think she was condescending!

That you would bring this woman to our church and allow her to stomp all over our faith – all the while you sat smiling and nodding your head in agreement.

What further questions do you have about this faith or your own?

I need time to process.

Who wrote Torah?

There are not enough words to express all the questions.

I have some thinking to do.

More on the history of the Babylonian exile. What is the order of the books of Torah vs order of Christian Old Testament?

I would like to talk to a Jew who is willing to talk more about the tenets than about her/his personal opinions. Why does speaker hate Christians and give snotty answers?

Liked your presentation.

Will read about Babylonian Exile.

Strength required about/for conversion and personal belief.

I'm a little bothered and confused. Ultimately, we probably each have our own individual faith that may include parts of all organized faith.

I would have liked to have heard Anne 's own journey story.

Christ's life would tell us to live just as Jews espouse?

Differences in beliefs.

This presentation/speaker was awful! I thought the same thing the last time she spoke at our church but I wanted to give her another chance because I thought she was angered by the poor turnout. Based on Anne 's "presentation" this time around, I NEVER want to hear her speak again. She is rude and condescending and very offensive. Clearly you should have had her come the first week to learn about Stendahl's 3 Rules of Religious Understanding. I do not need nor want Anne Rome to trash Christianity and tell me what my beliefs are and why they are wrong. I have <u>never</u> had any but respect for the Jewish religion and culture UNTIL LAST NIGHT. I would hope that Anne is not representative of this religion. She attacked our beliefs and belittled all Christians. She very loudly and proudly wears a "chip on her shoulder" which she has built into a mountain. You owe Good Shepherd an apology for bringing such an angry, disrespectful person to speak to us, belittle us and tell us that our beliefs are incorrect because she knows the actual truth.

Appendix J: The Rev. Isaiah Brokenleg Presentation 3 - Lakota Spirituality - Sept 25, 2019

Native Spirituality is not the same around the country. There are different tribes and cultures.

Dakota/Lakota Spirituality is based on Relationship with others and with God.

Mitakuye Oyasin means "we are all related," "God bless all my relatives," or "All my relatives" and we are related to all of creation.

God has many names. One is called *Wakantanka* meaning "Powerful or Strong Sacred Thing" or "Great Mystery." This is a non-gendered name.

God is sometimes called *Tunkashila* meaning Grandfather or *Unchi* meaning Grandmother.

There is also a name for God too sacred to mention.

"*Winkte*" is a spiritual/social role in Lakota culture. It is a third gender in Lakota culture. *Winkté* are considered sacred people who are called to serve their community. They walk between the natural/supernatural, masculine/feminine, etc.

Societal values for the Lakota/four main virtues:

1. Generosity
2. Wisdom
3. Fortitude/Endurance
4. Bravery

White Buffalo Calf Woman gave us our 7 ceremonies to the Lakota people and promised to return as she came. There is great celebration when a white buffalo calf is born.

From *Mother Earth Spirituality*: Ceremonies demonstrating these values:

1. Giveaway – part of many ceremonies, gifts given to others not to family.
    a. *Watecha* – food given to all as they have need after a feast. (*watecha* is not necessarily part of the give away)
2. Birth and Death are the purest form of ceremony
3. Memorials happen one year after a death to allow time to mourn and then to give everything belonging to the deceased loved one away so as to not hold them from entering the Spirit World. When you see the Milky Way they are the spirits of our loved ones making their journey to the spirit world
4. *Inipi* – known as the "Sweat Lodge" – begins with four direction song, pipe song used
    a. There are four rounds/sessions in the lodge
    b. Rebirth, cleansing
    c. Men are required to do this, women are not because they already cleanse themselves monthly.
5. Sundance – done once a year – done differently in each place and by different families
    a. A tree is in the center of the Sundance arbor
    b. Sundancers take on pain so that the people may have life.
    c. Typically, dancers commit to this for four years.
    d. Fasting, no drugs or alcohol, live life in a good way
    e. Piercing or flesh offering
6. *Hanblecha* – "Crying for a Vision" also called Vision Quest or "Sitting on a Hill"
    a. For discernment and for rite of passage
7. *Yuwipi* – for the purpose of healing the sick (mind body spirit and/or emotional healing)
    a. Medicine person is tied up, spirits seen as flashes of light, song sung

8. *Hunka* – "Making of Relatives" like adoption
    a. Creates a family bond that goes beyond blood relation
    b. Involves a responsibility to take care of family members of adopted family
9. Pipe "*Chanupa*" – not commercial tobacco used but red willow bark
    a. Male and female pipes
    b. Smoke is not inhaled
    c. Smoke brings prayers to the Creator or represents the breath of Creator
10. Wiping of Tears – done one year after a death. Tears would keep a loved one from entering the Spirit World. This ceremony sets them free from earth.
    a. Nagi gluhapi (Wanagi-this word means ghost and is not the name of the cermony) "Spirit Keeping" – things belonging to the person and sometimes some of the hair from a dead loved one is kept for one year and then burned.

Grant Peace Policy (1872)

Map of tribes around the country and which denominations they are associated with.

In order for a denomination to be assigned reservations they had to meet certain criteria which included having an Office of Native American ministry,

Grant's peace policy made denominations the Indian agents; in charge of reservations, schools, churches.

1978 American Indian Freedom of Religion Act made it no longer illegal to perform Native ceremonies.

Smudging-the act of burning a botanical substance and wafting the smoke to cleanse and bless things

Anything in nature is a medicine for something.

Water – the first medicine

Sage – gets rid of bad stuff

Cedar – gets rid of bad

Sweetgrass and Tobacco – bring good

Smudging used to cleanse (similar liturgically with Christian holy water), to bless things.

Four Sacred Directions (four stages of life, for seasons) Song

West – where thunders come from

North – cold and wisdom

East – where sun rises

Above – supernatural and abstract things

To Earth – concrete and natural

To yourself – take care of self

Roles in Lakota society:

Holy Men/Women – Medicine People – spiritual leaders – trained as apprentice or appointment by vision

Shirt Warrior – leader of community, not called "chief" that was imposed upon the people

Heyoka – backwards people, like a sacred clown, prophet, dance backwards, speak the opposite

Winkte – two spirit (this is an invented word that allowed Indians from many tribes to describe that third or fourth gender roles their communities have), has a holy role, "As Two Spirit, you don't 'come out', you 'come in' to your role."

Midwife role connected to Medicine person

Warrior – *Akichitá*

Redemption/Salvation in Lakota – no heaven or hell, all dead go to the Spirit World, we are all called to live life in a good way.

When we go to the spirit world we know only love

No Devil - *Iktomi* is the trickster

Bad medicine opens you to bad repercussions.

From Isaiah's Uncle Martin Brokenleg in an email he sent Isaiah:

Háu Mitákuyepi,

We had a long discussion with the White Hats who were the accepted interpreters at Rosebud. The word- wi'í'iŋkte - all four syllables and three stops, was the original word, a man who speaks using the women's language. Sloppy pronunciation reduced the word to Wíŋkte but "kills woman" doesn't make any sense. As you know, Lakȟóta culture has those three main genders while the Crow also have the fourth of women warriors.

I do remember Charlie Kills Enemy and others saying that Lakota communities are healthy if they have:

1.men who heal with medicines, pežúta wičaša

2. women who heal with medicines, pežúta wíŋyaŋ

3. men who heal with ceremony, wičáša wakáŋ

4. women who heal with ceremony, wíŋyaŋ wakáŋ

5. Itáŋčanpi

6. Načápi

7. Wi'í'iŋkte

Further Resources on Native History and Spirituality

From the Rev. Isaiah Brokenleg

Videos

- Doctrine of discovery video from the Episcopal Church

  https://youtu.be/drLnI_k5b6s

- Where the spirit lives (movie about the Canadian residential school experience)
- Lighting the 7th fire (documentary about fishing and hunting rights)
- Neither Wolf nor Dog (movie based on the book by Kent Nerburn)
- Bury my heart at wounded knee (movie based on the book by Dee Brown)
- The Cherokee Word for Water (story of Wilma Mankiller)

Books

- 400 years by Owanah Anderson (this is about the history of the Anglican/Episcopal church in Indian Country)
- Everything you wanted to know about Indians but were afraid to ask by Anton Treuer
- Neither wolf nor dog by Kent Nerburn
- Spirit and the flesh by Walter L Williams (this is about two-spirit stuff)
- That they may have life by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve (history of the Episcopal Church in South Dakota)
- Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihardt (this is controversial but I still think it is a good book)
- Nicholas Black Elk by Michael Steltenkamp (This is a less controversial version)
- Dakota Cross-Bearer by Mary E Cochran (biography of the first Native Bishop)
- Mother Earth Spirituality by Ed McGaa Eagle Man (this explain some of the ceremonies of the Lakota)
- Sundancing at Rosebud and Pine Ridge by Thomas E Mails (this one has great drawings and pictures)
- The Dakota Prisoner of War Letters translated and edited by Clifford Canku and Michael Simon
- Native and Christian by James Treat
- A Native American Theology by Clara Sue Kidwell
- Christ is a Native American by Achiel Peelman
- Bury my heart at wounded knee by Dee Brown

Appendix K: Lakota Spirituality Presentation Feedback

What new information did you learn during this presentation?

Info on ceremonies.

We are all related.

Lakota and Christian imposed – crosses May They Have Life, the meshing of his faith and a love for him.

None as was unable to hear speech.

4 virtues – generosity, wisdom, fortitude, bravery, *Inipi* represents re-birth.

Giveaway – Birth and death. *Inipi* – sweat lodge.

I grew up around traditional Lakota religion, so this was more a review, rather than the learning of anything new.

The *winkte* role.

Giveaway – Death (giving all the deceased's goods away) Committing to Sundance – must be sober to dance. Yuwipi – Unction (any tribe will know). Hunka = adoption. Pipes – male and female, never inhale.

Almost all.

Sundances

Inipi – Sweat Lodge Ceremony

1 year to mourn and give it all away. Hunka – adoption.

Tons - Very, very good!!

Relationship based. All of creation is related. *Inipi* – rebirth, cleansing, men are required.

White Buffalo Calf Woman – taught sacred ceremonies. Giveaway. If you hold onto things of dead person, you prevent them from moving on. 4 main virtues: generosity, wisdom,

fortitude, bravery. Two purest ceremonies birth and death. Catholic, Episcopal, Dutch Reformed.

Freedom, love, being a good relative.

Ceremonies. Pasts of the community.

"Our Way of Life" Based on relationship with each other. Relative – earth, animals, all people, non gender.

What positive aspect of the faith presented struck you?

The idea that certain things are "like Jesus."

Relatives with all things.

Self-sacrifice of one for the goodness of the people through Sundance.

Called to live life in a good way cause all are related.

Importance of relationships.

The sage and cedar.

That we are all related.

How similar our faith "stories" are.

Their belief in a higher power. There is no hell – no need for redemption.

Based on relationships with others and God.

Family – community.

Yuwipi ceremony. Hunka.

Relationships – to each other and the earth. 4 virtues.

Many things.

Based on love/caring/compassion to others.

Offer water 1st as healing agent. Gentle thoughtful faith practices that are easy to relate to.

The importance of "relatives" and taking responsibility for other people – "love thy neighbor."

The similarities between their stories and the Old Testament.

What do you want to keep as a blessing?

The language we use – matters – we say LGBTQ folks "come out" in the Indian spirituality they "come into" the community.

[drawing of a tipi with a cross on top from the Niobrara cross given to D/Lakota confirmands]

Coming into community to love and serve. Freedom, love and being a good neighbor. Great respect for Rev. Isaiah and his beliefs. Pray energy (negative) goes to place of peace rather than resentment.

The concept of Mitakuye Oyasin.

Burning of sage as a cleansing.

The respect that traditional Lakota religion engenders for our environment.

We are all in relationship.

Lakotan care of their elders.

It is a very spiritual faith.

Pipe.

We are similar.

Care for each other – adopting each other!! Love it.

That same aspect of love shared by Lakota and sharing.

Lakota and Christianity are not in conflict with each other. I like the idea of coming into yoru role in the community.

The importance of caring for other people.

Going to Spirit world. Tipi =s free birth

What surprised you?

A relative could be a rock.

"Winkte" (2-spirited)

Illegal to do ceremonies until 1978! American Indian Freedom of Religion Ac. Water as medicine – always offer first in any circumstance.

White Buffalo Calf.

Nothing.

The "contrary" person.

Piercing themselves during the Sundance. "Chiefs" were forced upon them – their leaders were Shirt Warriors.

Learning of Bishop Whipple petitioning for new trials and Niobrara cross of Bishop Hare.

Difference in Male and Female pipes. 1978 end of Native Religion ban.

Most of it.

Nothing really – worked on a reservation for 3 years.

The 1978 Freedom of Religion Act.

What further questions do you have about this faith or your own?

Many but I will research as I have time.

The social function of heyokas as ultimate sacrifice. Kettle Jane ceremony. I would like to learn more of possible parallels between Christianity and Red Road.

How did the earliest Christian missionaries go about generating interest on the part of native Americans in converting to Christianity?

How can we be more relational in our spirituality? (Much better by far!)

I'd love to know more about creation story.

I'll check the bibliography. A real pleasure and a "boat load" of info.

Appendix L: Presentation 4 - Hinduism: A Way of Life - Chandradhar Dwivedi Oct. 2, 2019

- Vedic/Sanatan Dharma (Religion of Knowledge/Nobility)
- Oldest religion
- Not based on teaching of a single person
- Most of Hindus live in India and Nepal
- Approximately 500 Hindu families live in this area
- Hindu Temple of Sioux Land, Tea, SD

Hindu Trinity

- God for creation
- God for preservation
- God for death

God for Creation

- Brahma
- Married to Saraswati- Goddess for learning and art

God for Preservation

- Vishnu
- Married to Lakshmi- Goddess for wisdom and prosperity

Incarnations (Avataar)

- Vishnu has 10 incarnations including Lord Rama and Lord Krishna
- Hanuman, monkey God, a devotee of Rama is also worshipped

God for Death

- Shiva
- Married to Parvati- Goddess for motherly love

Ganesha

- Son of Shiva and Parvati
- An elephant head God
- Ganapati (Chief of God)
- Remover of obstacles
- God for good luck
- Worshipped first
- Parvati could turn into Durga and Kaali (Shakti, to destroy demons)

Hindu Scriptures

- Original Hindu Scriptures were written in Sanskrit Shlokas (verses)
- Vedas- Rigveda, Saamveda, Atharvaveda, Yajurveda

(written around 5000 BC)

- Upveda (supplement to vedas)- Ayurveda (describes medicinal herbs, yoga, pranayam and meditation)

- Upnishads (describe Hindu philosophy)
- Puranas (simplify Hindu philosophy in stories such as Satyanarayan Katha in Skand Purana)
- Bhagvad Gita
- Ramayana

Sanskaars (Rites)

- Hindus have 16 sanskaars in their life including birth and death
- Hindus are cremated after death
- Mourning may be for 13 days to one year
- Shaving head by men is one form of mourning
- Hindus believe soul is undestroyable
- Only body dies
- Soul goes to heaven or hell or gets incarnated in new body depending on the karma (deeds) in previous life

Nirvana/Moksha (Divine Salvation)

- Ultimate goal is to be free from cycle of birth and death
- Achieve Nirvana/Moksha (Divine Salvation)

Castes

- Brahmin- priests, teachers, advisors to rulers

- Kshatriya- rulers, warriors
- Vaishya- business
- Shudra- working class
- Castes system was more associated with political, social and cultural influences than religion in India and neighboring countries
- Castes system slowly is disappearing in modern India. However, due to reservations for opportunities for lower caste persons, politicians are exploiting the castes system

Prayers

Oh all pervading Lord, you are the creator, preserver and destroyer; pure and purifier; free from all pains; energizer and basis of the life of the multiformed universe. Please direct our knowledge and intellect in the right direction to follow the path of truth, good deeds and enlightenment.

Om, May we be all protected

May we al be nourished

May we work together with great energy

May our intellect be sharpened

Let there be no animosity amongst us

Om, peace (in me), peace (in nature), peace (in divine forces).

Om, May All become Happy,

May All be Free from Illness.

May All See what is Auspicious,

May no one Suffer.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

Please guide us from lies to truth, darkness to light, and death to immortality.

May everyone be joyful, without disease, see happiness and be without any sorrows.

Let us pray for the peace on the earth, water, herbs, plants, and in the universe.

May all Gods and goddesses grant peace in everything. May we all realize the peace.

Om peace! Om peace! Om peace!

Diet

- Hindus do not eat beef
- Hindus may not eat any meat on certain days
- Hindus may be vegetarian
- Hindus may fast on certain days

Appearance

Married women may have Bindi on their forehead and sindoor (vermillion) on their part

Married Hindus may not wear wedding ring

Married Hindu women may wear

Mangalsutra (Nupital necklace)

Married Hindu women may wear toe ring

Hindus men may have Tilak on their forehead

Appendix M: Hinduism Presentation Feedback

What new information did you learn during this presentation?

That Hinduism has very deep all-inclusive philosophy.

So much…everything.

Almost everything was new.

I didn't know much about the religion or culture, so most everything was new.

Weekly fasting. Importance of cows are like mother.

I learn of a new religion. Very interesting.

Way of life rather than a specific religion. Trinity – 3 gods – creation (Brahma), preservation (Vishnu), and death (Shiva). Avataar.

A way of life.

Hinduism – Vedic/Santan Dharma (Religion of Knowledge/Nobility) God for Creation/Preservation/Death.

Number of families (approx. 500) practicing Hinduism in Sioux Falls area – I was surprised there are that many.

It was 100% new. Wow!! I knew *nothing* on any slide – maybe a "smidge" about reincarnation.

The caste system – exploited by politicians.

More about the specific gods. 16 sankaars (rites) in life. Gandhi is 1500 years old – 101st birthday. They fast for one day specifically. One meal a day.

500 Hindus live in the area. The oldest religion. "Hindu" is a European name.

Hindu Trinity. Mother-love God – has great power (to destroy demons)

Very flexible. Oldest religion – 5000 B.C. Hindu Trinity – God for Creation, Preservation, Death. 500 Hindu families live in area.

Flexible practice. Rising sun – remove darkness from your life. 3 Gods/Trinity – God for Creation, Preservation, Death (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), multiple faces and arms – no one has seen them. Karma = deeds. Nirvana – free from cycle of birth/death. Hindu scriptures Sanskrit, 16 rites/rituals.

The caste system was more of a regional, functional thing. The way its been poorly adapted for more exploitive purposes.

All New – 5000 BC, Scripture Sanskrit, 16 Sankaars.

Hinduism as a "way of life."

Info on the Gods x2.

Reincarnation and cremation.

Mainly about the many gods, the human like qualities of the gods and the ability to worship in many ways.

What positive aspect of the faith presented struck you?

It's universal.

The prayers are similar.

Peaceful faith.

The great respect for all creation.

Openness, flexibility.

How many gods they have.

Not one specific way (a right way). Nirvana (divine incarnation). Angels? Very flexible faith.

Oldest religion. Believe in reincarnation.

Hindu trinity – God for creation (Brahma), God for preservation (Vishnu), God for death (Shiva). Belief in Reincarnation.

Wrapped up with nature – all nature is sacred.

There is a general feeling of good will that I find in every Hindu person I have met.

Hindu trinity of Gods. Peaceful and positivity of faith. Heaven and hell. Flexible.

I loved the prayers that were shared with us. Everything is worthy of worship.

They have a trinity. They worship everything – not just humans.

Kindness. The 3 rules of religious understanding – I use them each week as an opening in our class at Zion Lutheran "My Neighbor is Muslim"

God for Creation. Worship any thing in nature. 16 steps in life. Mourning 13 days to 1 year.

Believe in things of substance, not just one entity (God/Jesus).

It's cyclical, striving for goodness.

Right Progression to follow. Path truth, goodness, and enlightenment.

Flexible, even though has so many "rules."

Similarities with Christian and Hindu x2

Acceptance of practices.

The freedom of thinking for oneself. The beauty of ceremonies (from temple visit).

What do you want to keep as a blessing?

The "OM" prayer.

The joy and love he emanated. His openness.

Our prayers as Christians are very similar to Hindu prayers.

The beautiful prayer.

The prayer.

The prayers they have.

Karma. Main prayer asking for strength, courage.

Sanskaars (Rites).

One's soul is indestructible.

Loved the prayers. This was wonderful!

The simplicity and directness of the prayers.

Soul is indestructible – "afterlife" dependent on how you live your life.

There is no one way to practice (Hinduism) very flexible. Their prayers.

Their prayers.

"May there be no animosity between us." Om Peace, peace, peace. Universal. No one way to practice the faith.

Soul is not destroyed.

Reincarnation is a comforting concept. Soul is not destroyable.

There is much we all have in common! And the ability to find joy!

Similarity to Christian Prayer.

Peace to all.

The whole info he presented.

Care and accept others.

The relaxed nature of worship – can't do it wrong because "right" is an individual concept.

What surprised you?

Nepal is the only Hindu country.

He attends church and learns.

Beliefs ae more individual than institutional.

How everything in prayer is the same as Christians pray.

Nothing (I teach a World Religions course)

How we all don't know how to explain but just how many gods they have and all the gods have developed with what they represent.

Nepal is majority of Hinduism. Sankaars 16 including birth, death. Any body dies – heaven or hell or gets incarnated in new body depending on karma (ie deeds in previous life)

500 Hindu families live in Tea SD

Castes. Do not eat beef.

Hinduism is oldest religion.

The structure of the "god-system" – <u>complex</u>!

The flexibility of the Hindu faith.

How similar Hindu beliefs are to my own Christian faith.

Cow is considered to be like your mother. They are sacred but not holy. India is currently feeding Russia.

Hindu scriptures written 500 B.C.. Soul can get reincarnated in a new body (depending on Karma) also an animal.

Multiple faces and arms – artistic. No one has seen them – like our God. That India <u>can</u> feed itself.

Hindus don't eat beef. Married women wear ring on toe.

Oldest religion. Gods are married – we can relate to.

Gods and goddesses are married (what does a God and Goddess marriage look like? Wowsers!)

Many – support their people with all food.

How well all the tradition of Hinduism.

Trinity.

Nothing because of visit and previous reading.

What further questions do you have about this faith or your own?

How the Hell/Heaven concepts are depicted. Are they similar to Dante's/Christian ideas? Does fasting also deprive you from having water?

Many thanks, Christina for providing this service for the community!

Cows – sacred like "mother's milk." Hindus don't eat beef. India Green revolution – can grow or feed over a billion people, totally self-supporting.

I want to learn more about the "gods" and their stories.

Why have Christians become less flexible?

What a pleasure it was to hear him – Thanks!

Why are people from all faiths so prone to rambling when they talk about their religions? I can 't talk succinctly about my faith, in every faith talk I've been a part of or listened to, people talk all over the place. It's fascinating to me. Are there Hindu mystics? What are they like? What might be the Christian equivalent of castes? How are we stratifying and ranking our fellow believers in maybe well-intentioned but ultimately exploitive ways? Is there anything equivalent to Christian saints in Hinduism? I feel like there's a connection between Dante's Purgatorio and Samsara (cycle of reincarnation) but I can't put the connection into words. But it's comforting to feel the connection.

I'll study further with my good friend.

Universal – dig for Roman Catholics.

Like to know more about basic accepted doctrines.

Appendix N: Presentation 5 - Introduction to Islam, October 9, 2019

Dr. Mohammed Z Qamar, The Muslim Community Center of South Dakota (MCCSD)

Some Common Words/Terms:

Allah = One Divine or Supreme Entity

- Allah is beyond gender and beyond any physical limitations or constructs of the mind
- Allah is the Arabic word for God in Abrahamic religions. Used by all Arab speaking populations including Christians and Jews

Common terms used by Muslims invoking Allah:

- In sha Allah- God willing
- Bis millah- In the name of God
- Al hamdu lillah- Thanks to God
- Sub han Allah – Glory or Praise be to God
- Allah hu Akbar – God is great

- Holy book of Islam “Quran”.
- Prophet of Islam Muhammad.
- Place of worship “Masjid” (= Mosque).
- Allowed in Islam “HALAL”.
- Prohibited in Islam “HARAM”.

The Ideal Muslim Practice:

- To find balance and harmonize “Iman” and “Rituals”
- Every action should be like an act of worship as if in the sight of God. (Ikhlas)
- Muslim communities should uphold and foster a system of social justice and harmony.

Prophet Muhammad’s Final address:

“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab over an Arab. Also a white person has no superiority over a black person nor a black has any superiority over a white - except by piety and good actions.”

Faith (Iman) => Ikhlas (sincerity) => Rituals (Islam) => Faith

What is Iman (Faith)?

To believe in…

1. ONE GOD (Monotheism)
2. ANGELS
3. PROPHETS (MESSENGERS)
4. DIVINE REVELATIONS
5. DAY OF JUDGEMENT
6. FATE (PREDESTINATION)

Core practices of Islam – 5 Pillars

- Shahada – I bear witness that there is no God besides Allah and I bear witness that the prophet Muhammad is his servant and messenger
- Salat (Prayer)

- Five times everyday.
- Physical act of worship includes bowing and prostration.
- Face Mecca during prayers
- Recommended in congregation or in a mosque
- Friday Afternoon prayers (JUMMAH) have to be prayed in congregation
- Ablution “Wudu” – ritual washing of arms, face, and feet prior to prayer or reciting the Quran to make one presentable and clean in the sight of God

- Sawm (Fasting)
  - The month of RAMADAN
  - Timing changes because it follows the lunar year (~ 11 days shorter than the Gregorian year calendar)
  - Abstain from eating, drinking, and sexual relations from dawn to sunset everyday.
  - Self control, humility and charity
  - Exceptions:Children, Sick, travellers, elderly, pregnant or breast feeding
  - Ends with the “Eid” Celebration
  - Fasting is seen as a mean of purifying the body and the soul.
  - Reminder that God is the sustainer
  - Experience the feelings of poor and needy people
  - Break the daily routine
  - Opportunity to quit or develop new habits
  - Teaches patience

    - Simple rule: If breaking the fast is a medical necessity, then continuing with it becomes a sin.
- Zakat (Charity)
    - 2.5% of the savings at the end of the year. Applied to cash, savings and jewelry
    - Has to be given before the end of Ramadan
    - Cannot be given to immediate family such as spouse, children or parents but can be given to siblings if they are in need.
    - Can be given to anyone else who is poor and needy including non Muslims
    - It is recommended that the first right of Zakat is people in your own community
- Hajj (Pilgrimage)
    - Largest annual religious gathering in the world
    - 2-3 Million pilgrims
    - Commemorates the journey of Prophet Mohammad and sacrifice that Prophet Abraham was asked to make
    - Once in a lifetime for adults who are physically and financially able to do so.
    - Ends with the 2nd "Eid"

Culture vs. Religion - **Not every cultural tradition is derived from religion no matter how commonly practiced it is**

- Not letting women drive (Saudi Arabia)
- Female Circumcision (Sub Saharan Africa)
- Preventing female education (Afghanistan)

- Burka or Niqab (Afghanistan and South Asia)
- Dowry System (S Asia)

The oldest continuously functioning University in the world??

- University Al Qarrawiyin in Fez, Morocco
- Established by Fatima Al Fihri in 859

Context is Important!!

- The primary source of Islamic guidance is the Quran
  - 114 Surahs
  - Not chronological
- 3 types of Arabic
  - Spoken
  - Standard
  - Ancient (Quranic)

  Other Sources of Islamic Law/Guidance:
  - Sunnah
  - Ijma (Consensus)
  - Ijtehad or Qiyas (Wisdom)

  Holy Days
- Friday is a significant and special day to Muslims.

- The month of Ramadan
- The two major festivals in the Islamic calendar are: Eid al fitr & Eid al adha.
  - Like festivals in other religions, these are a time for family reunion and special religious services.

Islamic Dietary Guidelines

- Forbidden (Haram)
  - Pork products
  - Alcohol and intoxicants
  - Blood
  - Any animal that has been beaten, strangled or tortured/abused before slaughter
  - Carnivorous animals and birds of prey
  - Animals that have been confined in cruel conditions or fed non-vegetarian diet do not pass the Halal test.
- Permitted (Halal):
  - Hooved animals and herbivores: goat, cow, lamb, deer, chicken, turkey etc
  - All fish
  - "Zabihah": Method of slaughter: Reciting "Bismillah Al Rahman Al Rahim"
    - (In the name of Allah the Beneficent and Merciful)
  - Kosher: Considered very close to Halal

Dress

- Islam requires both men and women to dress modestly when in public or in the presence of non-family members of the opposite sex.
- One standard may not be followed by all Muslims. Some interpret the requirement for modesty to mean dressing modestly relative to the norms of the surrounding society.

"There shall be no compulsion in religion." - The Quran chapter 2 verse 256

Hijab

- Hijab is not a cultural requirement or object of oppression. It **cannot and must not** be forced upon anyone according to Islamic law
- Cultural practices influence the type of Hijab
- Right to dress must be protected just as the right to undress.
- Head scarf alone is not Hijab. Modesty in dress, speech and actions completes the Hijab

Foster Care and Adoption

- Foster care especially of orphans, is encouraged in Islam. However, under Islam, the child must always retain the family name of the biological family when known.
- Preserving lineage and inheritance rights is very important in Islam
- Ensure absolute transparency and fairness in the inheritance and finances of adopted children

Islam is the youngest 2nd Largest Monotheistic Religion

- Every 4th person worldwide

1.8 Billion Muslims – Sunni (85-90%) -- Shi'ite

- 32% of all Muslims are South Asian
- 20% in the Middle East
- 13% in Indonesia

How many Muslims live in America?

- 3 million Muslims
- 1% of the total population
- By 2050 ~ 8 million or 2%

Americans overestimate their minority populations sizes

Percent overestimation

Muslims 1,700%

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when one mentions Islam or Muslims???

Violence? Extremism?

What about these Muslims?

Some facts about Muslim-Americans

- 10% of all immigrants
- The most diverse Muslim population in the world
- 10% of all physicians
- 40% hold a college degree vs 29% for the average population
- Muslim women have the second highest levels of income and education among all ethnic groups

- The gender pay gap is the smallest among all ethnic/religious groups

- ***PEW RESEARCH CENTER***

"Do you love this country?"

Muslims in the military

- Muslims have a higher representation by percentage than the average population
- 2% vs <1.0%

There are currently about 2.2 million active-duty and reserve members in the US Military. Of those 5,896 self-identify as Muslim

Nine-in-ten U.S. Muslims proud to be American

Why the disconnect between the reality and the impression?

1. Fear of the unknown
   - Only 36% of Americans know a Muslim
   - Exaggerated portrayals in the media
   - "Stealth Jihad," "Shariah Law"
2. The evil actions of a vocal but miniscule minority
   - "Muslims don't condemn violence."
     - www.muslimcondemn.com
     - www.lettertoalbaghdadi.com
3. It is easier and self-assuring to believe the worst of people unlike yourself

Are Muslims inherently more predisposed to violence?

"Are Muslims Distinctive?" *Steven Fish*

- Predominantly Muslim countries average 2.1 murders/year/100,000 people vs 11 in non-Muslim majority countries.
- Muslims are equally supportive of democracy as non-Muslims
- Muslims are just as likely as Christians (>65%) to agree with the statement
    - "Religious leaders should not influence how people vote."

But what about Shariah Law and Jihad??

"Shariah"

- A path to water.
- There is no "Book of Shariah laws".
- A balance between the Divine and philosophical.
- Human interpretation of Shariah is *Fiqh*
- Shariah/Fiqh mainly pertains to how a Muslim should conduct his/her personal life.
- Shariah is not static and cannot be imposed upon a people against their will
- Breaking of oaths and lying is expressly against the spirit and "law" of Shariah
- Shariah does not supersede Civil law or the existing law of the land

Jihad

- There is no concept of "Holy War" in either the Quran or the Hadith.

- Physical “Jihad” is only justified in self defense
- “Hiraba” is a major sin in Islam
- No justification of violence against civilians, sick, women, children or destruction of places of worship, hospitals, trees, crops or animals
- Suicide is expressly forbidden and is an unforgivable sin.

What about “Taqqiya”?

- Dissimulation of religion when fearing death
- Historically used only in the early Meccan days and during the Spanish Inquisition
- Not a single mainstream scholar that advocates for Taqqiya currently.
- Absolutely forbidden to deceive people for personal or religious gain

The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge

The Consequences of Ignorance and Prejudice

- Anti-Mosque incidents

Collateral Damage of Islamophobia

- Multiple incidents of violent hate crimes against people who “look middle eastern”
- Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting in 2012

The Islamophobia Industry

- 33 Anti Muslim groups have funding >200 million dollars. *UC Berkley 2013*
- “About Islam, I recommend essentially everything written by Robert Spencer.” *Anders Brevik*

Words matter….

- The Christchurch Mosque Terrorist says
  - "The person that has influenced me above all was Candace Owens"
  - "Europe will fall and become a Muslim majority continent in 2050"

What can we do about all of this?

- Asking questions from Muslims directly.
- Having "Holy Envy".
- Be self-reflective and identify and confront our own prejudices
- Learning about the world in general and asking tougher questions from those in power.

Muslims Community Center of South Dakota (MCCSD)

Our Vision and Values

- To create a healthy social and spiritual environment in the community
- To facilitate proper Islamic education for children and adults.
- To establish a venue for interaction within the communities of South Dakota irrespective of ethnicity, race and religion.

Recommendations

- The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists, by ***Khaled Fadl***
- Are Muslims Distinctive?: A Look at the Evidence, by ***Steven Fish***
- The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West, by ***Todd Green***

- Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas, by ***Sylviane Diouf***
- What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam, By ***John Esposito***
- Shariah: What Everyone Needs to Know, by ***John Esposito***
- Muslims and the Making of America. ***Amir Hussain***

Appendix O: Islam Presentation Feedback

What new information did you learn during this presentation?

That suicide is absolutely forbidden.

Everything!

Difference between Sunni and Shiite.

Too much to summarize here.

Oldest continuous university founded by a woman.

Arabic speaking Christians use "Allah." Concept of zakar. Zum-Zum – the well. Diversity of American Muslims.

How overblown the Muslim population number is in the US compared to the reality – 1% of the population.

1 in 4 persons in the world are Muslim, 1% of US population.

The presentation mostly reinforced my prior knowledge of this faith. The things I learned were related to the personal aspects of Islamic faith.

Most was new.

All was new. Interesting statistics.

All of it.

Excellent review of what I have learned previously but presented in organized and excellent way.

Hadith. Heaven he's at feet of mother.

Ideal Muslim practice. Muhammad's final address.

Name Allah – Christian, Jews and Muslims. Balance. Pilgrimage – one in a lifetime. No compulsion. Only justified war is defensive. Suicide is forbidden.

Allah beyond gender. Washing before prayer. Oldest college in 859 established by a woman. Do the least harm. About hijab.

Faith and practice.

Too much for this space.

Terms for the rites, seasons.

The five pillars. There are a lot of misconceived cultural ideas. Hijab is not simply the headscarf.

Different branches/sect/denominations.

How similar our beliefs are. Friday is most holy day of the week. Dietary guidelines very close to Kosher. 3 million Muslims in US, 1% of population.

Ideal practice = balance and harmonize Iman and Rituals. Uphold and foster? Belief in angels and prophets. Day of judgement. Sharia law cannot be forced on people against their will.

Ikhua – Love of God. Faith of Iman

What positive aspect of the faith presented struck you?

The pilgrimage: most important learning is how you get along with others, patience, humility.

Caring for others, adoption, mandatory charity.

Very prayerful.

If you become angry/impatient during Hajj, you have failed.

Focus on integrity of one's own faith development.

A non-gendered supreme being. Gathering of people from all backgrounds at hajj. Preservation of identity in adoption.

That nothing is to be imposed on someone who isn't willing.

Commitment to prayer.

The strength of the peaceful aspects of Islam.

Humbleness.

How you conduct yourself in all aspects of trying to honor God.

Faith rituals.

Everyone treated equally. Shariah – "a path to water" – divine will as philosophical.

Similarities to Christianity.

Devotion to prayer.

Charity to everyone.

Do your best and remember Allah is watching.

The room for personal practice within a larger religious framework, not all Muslims have the same convictions.

"There shall be no compulsion in religion." How flexible the 5 pillars are to avoid harm.

Practices are not forced upon individuals – you get to decide if you wear hijab or how you pray – it's between you and God. No compulsion.

Peaceful. Prayerful.

Prophets – Adam. Monotheism. Shahada. Salak prayer.

What do you want to keep as a blessing?

Wearing the hijab is an act of courage. No one is compelled to wear it.

Worship is to build community. Direct relationship with God.

The humility and the patience and self-sacrifice that fasting teaches.

Joyful faithfulness.

Do every action as if in the sight of God.

The Islamic declaration, “God is great.”

Confront prejudices.

“There should be no compulsion in religion.”

Information.

Peaceful/self-improvement.

Six articles of faith.

Social justice and harmony. Disciplines to be best self. Humility in getting along with others.

They want exactly what all of us want.

No compulsion.

Good question. Don’t know.

Bits from the 5 pillars and Shariah.

Do the least harm.

They’re not terrorists! It’s a religion of peace.

What surprised you?

How similar we are.

Similarities between most of the main religions.

Ablution as one of the pillars of faith. College in Fez founded by a woman in 9th century.

That women’s head covering varieties are cultural rather than religious.

There shall be no compulsion to religion.

The education rates for Muslims in the US.

Similarity of practices.

All of it.

Rules of Ramadan. University established 849 by Muslims. No compulsion in Islam. "Required to uphold my own soul" quote. Suicide is a sin.

Culture vs Religion. Oldest University in the world.

Jesus is a Muslim prophet.

His humility in acknowledging the more he shares about his faith, the more he learns.

Different groups within Muslims.

That our speaker, fabulous speaker, has not encountered more racism.

Commonly observed cultural traditions that aren't religious obligations.

Jewish dietary requirements are mostly the same. The diversity of Muslims. Sioux Falls has 3 mosques.

None of the stereotypical images of Islam/Muslims is found in Islamic law. No book of "Shariah Law."

Wadu – cleansing. Fast – Sawm – 30 days. Foster Care and adoption is encouraged.

What further questions do you have about this faith or your own?

Want to go to Mosque. Suni => Shiite, Catholic => Episcopal!

How the concept of Agape (unconditional love) is manifested in Islam/Quran?

I'd like to know more about the Hajj. I'm interested in the idea of pilgrimage and meditative retreat I my faith life.

I intend to do more investigation.

Shiite – Sunni??

What is Sikh?

Want to learn about their prayers.

General: Love to hear and learn about various divisions of Christianity. Overall a very nice to be part of this series. Came at the right time for me. - Dr Chandar Singaram

Really a great lesson.

Dajjal? Jinn? Deen vs Iman. Sacrifices (animal).

Why is Friday their holy day?

Anne Rome equated the Old Testament foreshadowing the coming of Jesus to the New Testament predicting the coming of Muhammed. What do Muslims think?

Appendix P: Final Interviews

All religions similar – God, family, taking care of other people, systematic worship. Other religions more similar than I thought. More similar than dissimilar.

Glad to visit Jewish synagogue and hear another presenter on Judaism giving some detail not covered before, helpful reference website Judaisim101, get feeling for a Jewish person.

Anne was the worst anti-Christian, communicated "leave us alone."

Taught me that it's okay to add pieces of their religions, like prayer 5 times a day to my own practice.

What we share with Judaism and Islam, Jan and Dr. Qamar, because we all come from Abraham.

Does it matter that they don't believe Jesus is God? How they see Jesus made me feel a brotherhood.

Not ritually or look alike – one God or many forms of one God.

Speakers were very accepting of other ways of thinking.

I'd like to do this again as a cycle with other religions or other denominations, for example Fr. Sava, the Greek Orthodox priest.

How media has created fear and prejudice about Islam and I have bought into that.

Good to get a different perspective on Islam – hijab not mandatory, women are revered, that there was Muslim opposition to ISIS.

I saw a more compassionate side of Islam. Muslims are not out to take down Christians.

What does Islam say about homosexuality?

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